

What might happen if viruses jump from pet dogs to humans? That worrisome future is already here

[S]cientists are reporting that they have discovered what may be the latest coronavirus to jump from animals into people. And it comes from a surprising source: dogs.

When the COVID-19 pandemic first exploded, Dr. Gregory Gray started to wonder whether there might be other coronaviruses out there already making people sick and threatening to trigger another outbreak.

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In the first batch of samples tested last year, Gray and [graduate student Leshan] Xiu found evidence of an entirely new coronavirus associated with pneumonia in hospitalized patients [at a Malaysian hospital] — mostly in kids. This virus may be the eighth coronavirus known to cause disease in people, the [team reports](#).

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“We did discover a very, very unique mutation — or deletion — in the genome,” [virologist Anastasia] Vlasova says. That specific deletion, she says, isn’t present in any other known dog coronaviruses, but it is found somewhere else: in human coronaviruses... This deletion, she believes, helps the dog virus infect or persist inside humans.

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Vlasova and her colleagues are catching this new coronavirus early on in its journey in people, while it’s still trying to figure out how to infect people efficiently — and possibly, before it can spread from person to person and trigger a big outbreak.

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