



Notification
24.9.2020

The sharp noses of dogs are utilized at the Helsinki-Vantaa Airport

The City of Vantaa has decided to test the use of so-called corona dogs at the Helsinki-Vantaa Airport, because it is believed to be an effective measure for developing health safety. Dogs have an extremely sharp sense of smell, and it is worth exploring how to utilize it for managing the coronavirus pandemic.

A pilot project has been started with four dogs that are sniffing samples at the airport. The official status of corona dogs is still being clarified, so civilian dogs are used in the pilot instead of service dogs. Civilian dogs are not being trained for sniffing humans directly. Participation in testing with dogs is voluntary at this time. All passengers and airport personnel can seek to be tested. It will be possible to go over to the use of official coronavirus testing with service dogs when permitted by a change in the law.

Work shifts are done in accord with the dogs' endurance

Nose Academy Oy is responsible for the training and operation of the dogs.

- We have ten dogs that can reliably work in the airport environment, says University of Helsinki research coordinator and Nose Academy CEO Susanna Paavilainen.

- Almost all the dogs have some smell background already, some may already have several smells that they recognize and search for. In addition to the smell of coronavirus, they need to be trained to function in the airport environment.

- Some of the dogs will remain as laboratory dogs, that will sniff samples in very calm circumstances without distractions. The work shifts of a dog proceed in terms of the dogs' endurance, so we always have two dogs ready to step in while two others are on a work shift.

The testing at the airport has been designed to be safe

The testing at the Helsinki-Vantaa Airport has been designed carefully. Passengers who are allergic to dogs or are afraid of them have been taken into consideration, and so now a dog will smell only samples swiped from the skin, that is, not the people directly.

When a passenger at the airport comes to the corona dog sampling station, he or she steps into a small space delineated by screens, where he or she takes a skin swipe from him or herself according to the instructions given and drops the sample into the container provided for it. The dog and its trainer are behind a wall, where the dog sniffs the given sample. In this way the allergic passengers, among others, are taken into consideration, and care is taken that the trainers are not subjected to the coronavirus. Personal information is not collected at the sampling station. If the result is positive, the passenger is directed to the Helsinki University Hospital's health information station for further instructions.

- It is often asked if a dog can catch coronavirus. According to studies, dogs lack the receptor to which the coronavirus attaches, says Susanna Paavilainen. She adds that there has also been no information from around the world that dogs of corona patients would have become ill.

Dogs recognize the coronavirus easily

It has been discovered that coronavirus is easy to smell for dogs, so because of this, training dogs is relatively fast, and the results are good. The training of a dog to be a corona dog is very individualistic, however.



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Learning the smell of coronavirus takes from a few hours to a few months. International peer-reviewed studies have shown that a dog's ability to find positive patients is about 94-100%, depending on the dog.

What is special is that dogs can also detect coronavirus from a significantly lower amount of virus than the commonly used PCR tests. This means that a dog will be able to identify the coronavirus in humans earlier than laboratory tests. It has also been found that a dog's nose has identified coronavirus infection in asymptomatic people days before the onset of coronavirus symptoms. Laboratory tests cannot do this.

Additional information:

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