



ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

RICHARD A. BALL
Commissioner

May 29, 2020

To: New York Veterinary Practices

From: New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets

Interim Guidance to Veterinarians Resuming Elective, Non-Urgent Veterinary Procedures and/or Examinations

The protection of animal health and well-being is critical not only to animals, but their owner(s). Veterinary professionals perform a critical public health function and resuming regular and preventive animal care is an important step in New York's recovery from COVID-19.

Veterinarians throughout New York have instituted practices designed to protect the health of staff, clients, and patients. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to the veterinary profession and their clients as veterinary practices in New York State resume elective procedures and non-urgent care for all animals throughout New York State.

Veterinary practices have been deemed essential by Empire State Development, pursuant to Executive Order 202.6.

As is the case with all activities during the public health emergency, veterinary practice must be carried out with strict attention to social distancing, monitoring the health of clinic staff and visitors, and reducing the density of people in the clinic. A useful reference for veterinary practices is the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) "Guidance for Veterinarians", available at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/veterinarians.html>. Veterinarians must review the CDC guidance and to the extent practicable, apply it to their practice.

In order to protect the health of staff, clients, and patients, veterinary practices must comply with all NY Forward guidance as it relates to your operations. Please visit <https://forward.ny.gov/>.

Strategies to Safely Ensure Access to Veterinary Services During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

- Communicate with clients about the plans you intend to implement to minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission in the practice. This will further reassure clients and equip them with knowledge that will facilitate their animal's examination and treatment.
- Patients should be seen by appointment only, unless the required examination and/or treatment requires immediate action and human health is not threatened by the intake.
- When appointments are made, determine whether COVID-19 is suspected or has been confirmed in the home where the animal is cared for. If possible, defer seeing the animal until the illness in the household has resolved.
- If an animal requires immediate care, heightened precautions as described in the [CDC guidance](#) should be taken to minimize veterinary staff exposure.

- Curbside intake and pickup of animals should be used, wherever practical, to minimize the number of clients in waiting areas and exam rooms.
- When curbside intake is impracticable, a protocol must be developed to minimize, to the greatest extent possible, contact between or among the staff, the client, and others at the veterinary facility.
- In situations in which a handler must accompany an animal into a veterinary facility for drop off or pick up, to the extent possible, there should be only one handler per animal patient. Where social distancing cannot be maintained, both the handler and the facility staff should use appropriate nose and mouth coverings when within 6 feet of each other.
- Veterinarians and their staff may use their judgment to allow an additional person(s) to accompany the patient and handler in exigent circumstances (e.g. euthanasia).

Protecting Employees

Veterinary practices must prepare a plan to protect staff members and clients by reducing the potential transmission of COVID-19. Veterinary practices should:

- Screen staff members to determine if the staff member:
 1. Has a temperature greater than or equal to 100.0°F;
 2. Is experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, including cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, fever, chills, muscle pain, sore throat, or new loss of taste or smell; or
 3. Has knowingly been in close or proximate contact in the past 14 days with anyone who has tested positive for COVID-19 or who has or had symptoms of COVID-19.

If a staff member answers “Yes” to any of the screening questions, or begins to experience symptoms during the workday, the staff member should immediately be sent home with instructions to contact their healthcare provider for assessment and testing.

- Adjust workplace hours and shifts to reduce density in the workplace, to the greatest extent practicable.
- Enact social distancing protocols in the workplace. Social distancing protocols may include using floor markers in check-out areas, limiting use of kitchen areas or break rooms above 50% capacity (unless designed for a single occupant), spacing out seating options in the waiting area, and removing shared magazines or books in the lobby.
- Require all employees and customers to wear a face covering if social distancing cannot be maintained.
- Implement strict cleaning and sanitation standards, paying particular attention to high touch areas, such as point of sale terminals and door handles.

Evaluating and Testing Companion Animals for SARS-CoV-2 Infection

Routine testing of companion animals for SARS-CoV-2 is not recommended. Animal testing for SARS-CoV-2 is available for mammalian species for certain situations; testing is not currently available for amphibians, reptiles, fish, or birds. Veterinarians are strongly encouraged to rule out other, more common causes of illness before considering SARS-CoV-2 testing, especially among companion animals without a COVID-19 exposure. More information can be found at: https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/one_health/downloads/faq-sapho-on-companion-animal-testing.pdf.

Additional Resources:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/veterinarians.html>

<https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/NonFoodAgricultureMasterGuidance.pdf>

https://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/one_health/downloads/faq-sapho-on-companion-animal-testing.pdf

<https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19>