APHA Briefing Note 10/20
Advice for Veterinarians and their Clients on Pets and COVID-19

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Purpose

To provide advice to Veterinarians and their clients on pets and COVID-19.

General information on pets and COVID-19

There is no evidence of COVID-19 (Coronavirus) circulating in pets or other animals in the UK. There is nothing to suggest pets may transmit the disease to humans.

Pets could be a carrier (fomite) of the virus on their fur for short periods of time, just as other surfaces can carry the virus from one place to another.

In line with the general advice on COVID-19, you should wash your hands regularly including before and after you come into contact with animals and pets.

The advice to follow is slightly different depending on your clients’ circumstances, so they should follow the advice in https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-people-with-animals that is most relevant to their current situation.

Pets from households with confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19

Government advice is that owners of pets in households with confirmed or suspected COVID-19, who feel their pet may need treatment, should make contact with the practice first and alert them to the household’s status. The suggested order of preference for seeking advice or treatment from veterinary practices is set out in the scenarios below, but it needs to be adapted to the particular circumstances of each case. It is also recognised that there may well be emergency situations such as road traffic accidents, where there
may be no option but an urgent visit to the surgery and subsequent hospitalisation, and you may wish to consider how you would apply biosecurity measures at the practice in such circumstances. For further advice on protection of the personal health of practice employees and compliance with RCVS professional Codes, refer to Public Health England (PHE) guidance on infection prevention and control and recent RCVS advice.

Alternatively, and where appropriate, a veterinary telehealth provider may be able to provide advice to a pet owner.

(a) **Provide telephone advice if appropriate to the situation.** This might allow medication (if needed) to be collected from the surgery, without the need for the animal to attend. However, such collection should not be by any member of a household which is remaining at home due to a suspected or confirmed COVID-19 case. They should arrange for the medicine to be collected on their behalf by a friend, neighbour, or family member from an unaffected household. If it is not possible to organise collection, consider posting the medication. In non-urgent cases, it may be possible to defer an examination until the household’s 7 or 14 day stay at home period has passed.

(b) **If the pet needs to visit the surgery.** The pet should not be accompanied by any member of a household who is remaining at home due to a suspect or confirmed COVID-19 case. The owner should arrange for the pet to be brought to the surgery on their behalf by a friend, neighbour or family member from an unaffected household. The handler should wash their hands before and after handling the pet, and may be able to minimise direct contact with the pet by use of a pet carrier.

Consider advising the handler to visit at a quiet time during the day and ask if they can wait in the car park. It may be possible to carry out the consultation with the owner providing input via a telephone. Consider examining the pet outside the main surgery or in an annex away from other clients and pets. To minimise risk of fomite spread from or to the handler, carry out the examination independent of their input with support from practice staff if needed. Before undertaking the examination, make sure you have considered the RCVS Guidance in relation to protecting your and your staff’s personal health. Keep in mind risks posed by fomites from items such as a pet carrier and adhere to good hygiene practices, including wearing disposable gloves. Wear an outer garment that is disposable such as an apron, or something which can be replaced and laundered before examining other animals. Carry out appropriate cleaning and disinfection of the annex or other area used to examine the pet before other clients and pets are seen there.

(c) **If the pet needs to visit the surgery and separate facilities are not available at the premises.** The pet should not be accompanied by any member of a household which is remaining at home due to a suspect or confirmed...
COVID-19 case. They should arrange for the pet to be brought to the surgery on their behalf by a friend, neighbour, or family member from an unaffected household. The handler should wash their hands before and after handling the pet, and may be able to minimise direct contact with the pet by use of a pet carrier.

Consider advising the handler to visit at a quiet time during the day or planning consultations to allow more time in between. Ask the handler to wait with the animal outside and bring them directly into the consulting room. To minimise the risk of fomite spread from or to the handler, carry out the examination independent of their input with support from practice staff if needed. Before doing so, make sure to adhere to RCVS Guidance in considering you and your staff’s personal health. Keep in mind risks posed by fomites from items such as a pet carrier or other items from a self-isolating household. Adhere to good hygiene practices, including wearing disposable gloves. Wear an outer garment that is disposable such as an apron, or something which can be replaced and laundered before examining other animals. Carry out appropriate cleaning and disinfection of the consulting room before other clients and pets are seen.

(d) If it is felt essential to carry out a home visit. Make sure to adhere to RCVS Guidance in considering you and your staff’s personal health. A home visit can allow the owner to be present but without them having to attend the surgery. If there is a yard, garage, shed or garden you should consider the possibility and practicality of carrying out the consultation there, which means you do not have to enter the premises. If you as the attending veterinarian, along with any support staff, feel it is essential to carry out the consultation in the house, you should consult the Public Health England (PHE) guidance on infection prevention and control which would apply to healthcare workers in similar situations.

A further option may be to consider using a member of the practice staff to collect the pet from the household and return it, and doing the consultation in the surgery whilst speaking to the owner over the phone. Keep in mind risks posed by fomites from items such as a pet carrier or other items from a self-isolating household. Adhere to good hygiene practices, including wearing disposable gloves. Wear an outer garment that is disposable such as an apron, or something which can be replaced and laundered before examining other animals. Carry out appropriate cleaning and disinfection of the consulting room before other clients and pets are seen.

(e) If, despite Government advice, a pet owner who should be in self-isolation visits the surgery without calling in advance. This may occur in the case of a veterinary emergency such as a road traffic accident, so ensure you to adhere to RCVS Guidance in considering you and your staff’s personal health. Consider if there are any social distancing steps you and your staff can take during the visit.
Adhere to good hygiene practices, including wearing disposable gloves and an outer garment that is disposable such as an apron, or something which can be replaced and laundered before examining other animals. Keep in mind risks posed by fomites from items such as a pet carrier or other items from a self-isolating household. Carry out appropriate cleaning and disinfection of the consulting room before other clients and pets are seen.

PPE (Personal Protective Equipment)

If for any reason PPE is required for the scenarios outlined above, you should follow the PHE infection prevention and control guide.

You should use the virucidal disinfectants that you currently use around the practice. These should be effective against the virus. If this advice changes we will update the guidance.

Potential clinical signs and treatment

At this time there have only been three known cases of the virus in pet animals, two dogs in Hong Kong and one cat in Belgium. Both dogs remained asymptomatic, although one subsequently developed antibodies. The cat developed clinical signs (respiratory and gastro-intestinal), but it is not known if this was due to the virus. Virus was however, detected in vomitus and faeces. The cat is now recovering. Given this, and knowledge of other Coronaviruses in pet animal species, presenting signs might include fever, malaise, respiratory and/or gastro-intestinal tract problems. Virus in pet animals still appears to be a rare occurrence, but you will appreciate the knowledge base on this is developing all the time.

There is no specific treatment for the virus itself. However symptomatic treatment should be pursued as appropriate for the presenting clinical signs.

Caring for sick pets in households where individuals are self-isolating

Sick pets resident in households undergoing self-isolation should be cared for at home in the usual way. This will normally be by the owners if their symptoms are mild and they have not required hospitalisation, or by asymptomatic family members who are remaining in the house, even if some family members have been hospitalised.

Where pets have been left alone due to the hospitalisation of their owners due to COVID-19, you should refer the case to the owner’s Local Authority. However, you may be asked
to provide veterinary advice on what is best for the animal’s health and welfare in these circumstances.

**Advice where pet owners are in vulnerable groups**

You may have pet owner’s clients who are social distancing to protect their own health (as opposed to minimising the spread of the virus). To support these clients, consider organising collection or posting of medication. A friend or relative may be able to visit the practice with the pet. However, if this is not possible, consider other ways in which you may be able to support the owner and pet such as:

- Advising the owner to wait in the car outside
- Visiting at a quiet time of the day
- Planning consultations with extra time either side
- Carrying out the consultation without the owner being present with their input via a telephone conversation
- Organising a home visit.