

Guidance for UK veterinary practices on working safely during Covid-19

This BVA guidance is intended to support veterinary practices to continue to work safely in line with ongoing restrictions and government guidance.

It recognises that each individual veterinary practice will need to have measures in place that meet their own business and staff needs and that practices will need to work in line with national and devolved legislation and local guidance. It will be updated as the governments update their guidance on safe working.

This BVA guidance is supplementary to the [RCVS guidance](#), which is regularly reviewed and updated in line with legislative changes.

Government restrictions across the UK

In December 2021 governments across the UK have been considering and re-introducing measures and restrictions in light of the rapid spread of the Omicron variant. There is no specific government guidance for veterinary practices and practices have been able to stay open throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Veterinary professionals should refer to government websites for the latest information on local rules and restrictions for the general public and businesses:

[England](#) ~ [Scotland](#) ~ [Wales](#) ~ [Northern Ireland](#)

Working on the borders

Due to the legal differences and variations in approach between the four nations of the UK and between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, vets should be mindful of their own local situation and refer to the relevant government website for more information.

Veterinary professionals working with clients on both sides of a border will need to take this into consideration and work under the laws and guidance relevant to where the work is taking place.

General principles for veterinary practices

- 1. Safe working:** All services should be risk assessed and provided in a manner that supports safe working and social/physical distancing, but recognises that physical distancing will not always be possible between team members. Recommended ways of working include:
 - a. continuing to work from home if possible and appropriate
 - b. minimising in-person contact with clients
 - c. maintaining a safe physical distance from others where possible
 - d. working in fixed pairs or small teams, where possible, to reduce contact with others
 - e. considering wider health and safety needs, such as safe animal handling
 - f. practising good hand hygiene and biosecurity at all times
 - g. using lateral flow testing to improve identification of asymptomatic people
- 2. Prioritising caseloads:** Practices should continue to assess and prioritise veterinary caseloads based on clinical and professional judgement for animal health and welfare and

public health. Individual consults and procedures may take longer in order to practise social/physical distancing. Practices should consider how to charge appropriately for their professional time, including for remote consultations, and how best to communicate this to clients.

- 3. Supporting colleagues and encouraging rest/breaks:** Practice teams have been working incredibly hard and in different ways for a long time. Many individuals have worked extra hours; others have juggled work with caring responsibilities; and many have been impacted by the need for team members to isolate during periods of high incidence of infection. Employers should be aware of the importance of supporting all employees' mental health and wellbeing. Advice and guidance are available via [Vetlife](#), [Vet Support NI](#), and [Vet Support Scotland](#). The government has also provided [Guidance for the public on the mental health and wellbeing aspects of coronavirus](#).

Supporting one another

We continue to urge neighbouring practices to work together to ensure full geographical cover for emergency veterinary services, for example, where a practice is struggling to cover the rota due to staff self-isolating.

We are asking practices, at these difficult times, to put aside commercial interests to support one another, including encouraging the retention of clients by their original practices.

Face coverings

Face coverings in veterinary practice:

Members of the public are required to wear face coverings inside veterinary practices, unless they are exempt for age, health, or equality reasons. We advise practices to ask clients to let them know at the time of booking an appointment if they are exempt (without asking for the reason) so that appropriate steps can be taken to see the client safely.

For staff face coverings must be worn in public areas. In non-public areas there is some discretion when physical distancing can be maintained (with rules varying slightly across the UK), but face coverings are advised in all settings.

BVA Guidelines for safe working in veterinary workplaces

Practices have adapted brilliantly to new and different ways of Covid-safe working. As restrictions alter in line with government rules and guidance, we encourage all practices to continually risk assess any changes they are making in consultation with the whole team.

1. Undertake regular risk assessments for your workplace:

- Involve colleagues to help the whole team understand the risks of any changes and mitigating actions.

2. Minimise client contact, where possible:

- Use phone or video calls to triage and obtain histories and follow [RCVS guidance on remote consultations and prescribing](#).
- Think about which areas of the practice it is safe to allow clients in and provide clear signage.
- Manage client expectations and be clear about what measures they can expect.

3. Staff who can work from home should do so, for now:

- Practices should continue to support home working, where possible.

4. Minimise staff contact:

- Practices should consider working in fixed pairs or small teams, to keep everyone safe and be mindful that test, trace and isolate schemes are in place.
- Physical distancing measures should be maintained as far as possible.

5. Follow all hygiene and biosecurity measures:

- Use clear signage to remind colleagues and clients to comply with all measures.

6. Think about physical space and layout:

- Use floor markings and signage to help maintain physical distancing and reduce congestion.
- Maintain good ventilation.

7. Risk assess and plan ahead for all visits (inc homes, farms, and equine yards):

- Discuss plans in advance with clients and be clear about how you want to work and the safety measures you expect to have in place, such as ventilation, use of face coverings, and physical distancing.
- There is no expectation that vets should attend an infected or suspected Covid-19 household, in line with the RCVS Code supporting guidance (3.37f and 3.43).

8. Minimise the risks of vehicle sharing:

- If you need to share vehicles, maintain maximum space between occupants.
- Regularly clean vehicles.

For the latest BVA updates please visit: www.bva.co.uk/coronavirus

For species-specific advice, please visit relevant veterinary associations' websites.