

Covid-19 frequently asked questions

In the workplace

Can we stay open?

[Veterinary practices may remain open under the new rules](#). However, the number of clients seen face-to-face should be kept to an absolute minimum and veterinary teams must insist on strict social distancing measures at all times. Routine treatments should not be carried out until further notice, and clients and veterinary professionals should only travel to see animals if judged essential to do so. Animals should only be seen in emergencies or where, in the judgement of the veterinary surgeon, urgent assessment and/or treatment is needed in order to reduce the risk of patient deterioration to the point where it may become an emergency in the near future (ie within the three-week time frame currently laid out by the Government for these measures). You should exercise judgement as to when it is necessary for you to see an animal and/or their owner in person. [Read our guidance for veterinary practices in assessing emergency and urgent care during Covid-19 pandemic](#)

It is important to emphasise that under these current restrictions you can still triage cases and offer advice remotely eg via teleconsultation. [Please refer to RCVS guidance on remote prescribing POM-V medicines without a physical examination.](#)

What should I do if my employer is not following Government guidance on essential work and/or social distancing?

We are all responsible for slowing the spread of Covid-19 and veterinary practices must reduce face-to-face contact immediately. This means:

- switching to providing emergency care only
- fulfilment of urgent prescriptions; and
- maintaining the food supply chain

Vets and members of the veterinary team deemed essential to deliver this emergency care can travel to and from work. Other members of the team should work from home if possible (for example handling calls and triaging cases) or furloughed. The number of clients seen face-to-face should be kept to an absolute minimum and, where clients are seen, you should ensure you follow the [relevant guidance on social distancing](#). [Members of the team who are vulnerable](#), eg are aged over 70, have underlying health issues or are pregnant, should be encouraged to stay at home. If you have concerns as to how your employer is implementing these measures, please contact the [BVA legal helpline](#) and consult the [ACAS specific coronavirus guidance](#) for employers and employees.

How can I practise social distancing with the clients that I do see?

All vets should strictly follow [government advice on social distancing](#) to keep clients and colleagues safe. There are some general principles that should be adopted across the veterinary sector:

All unnecessary client contact must be stopped. You should:

- Clarify client's medical status with regard to Covid-19
- Obtain histories over the phone
- Use technology to triage and consult wherever possible
- Consider remote prescribing in line with [RCVS guidance](#)
- Obtain payment over the phone

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- Ensure contact-free collection of medication is in place, with a specific, secure collection time and place organised in advance
- Post medication if appropriate following [Post Office guidance](#) and, where applicable, following [RCVS controlled drugs guidance](#)

For sector specific guidance please consult [our guide for vets in clinical practice on assessing emergency and urgent care during the Covid-19 pandemic](#).

[Download the FECAVA advice for companion animal practitioners](#) and [pet owners](#)

If a person in my team develops Coronavirus symptoms and self-isolates, does the rest of the team need to self-isolate?

No. Only people who share a home with someone who is demonstrating symptoms of Coronavirus are required to self-isolate alongside them. You should continue to practise strict social distancing measures at work, avoiding all unnecessary contact with clients, maintaining a safe physical distance, and ensuring that animals are only seen face-to-face where absolutely necessary.

[Read government guidance on self-isolating](#)
[Read the BVA guidance for veterinary practices in assessing emergency and urgent care during the Covid-19 pandemic](#)

How should we provide care for 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 veterinary treatment, should make contact with the practice first and alert them to the household's status.

The [APHA Briefing Note 10/20 Advice for Veterinarians and their Clients on Pets and COVID-19](#) sets out that if you're contacted by a pet owner who is self-isolating or has a confirmed case of Covid-19 you should:

- In the first instance, provide advice remotely eg. by phone or teleconsult.
- If the pet needs to visit the surgery, advise the pet owner to get a neighbour or friend from an unaffected household to bring in the animal. 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.
- If the pet need to visit the surgery, you should follow government social distancing guidance and use PPE as per the [PHE infection prevention and control guide](#). You should use the virucidal disinfectants that you currently use around the practice after seeing the animal.

You should read the [APHA Briefing Note 10/20 Advice for Veterinarians and their Clients on Pets and COVID-19](#) **in full** before seeing a pet from a household with a confirmed or suspected case of Covid-19 in person.

How should we provide care for pets from households with owners who are in vulnerable groups?

Some clients may be social distancing to protect their own health, if they have underlying health conditions or are over 70 for example. The [APHA Briefing Note 10/20 Advice for Veterinarians and their Clients on Pets and COVID-19](#) sets out that 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 (**See FAQ on conducting home visits below**)

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Should we carry on with routine vaccinations?

It's important to remember that the current lockdown period is for three weeks and for the vast majority of pet vaccinations it is not urgent for them to be carried out in that time period. Adult boosters can and must be postponed for now. The vast majority of primary vaccinations in puppies, kittens and other naïve animals should also be delayed in order to protect human health in relation to halting the spread of Covid-19. [Read our statement.](#)

However, we recognise there may be a small number of exceptions where vaccination may be required. For example, shelter situations, disease outbreak situations, and naïve animals in high risk geographical areas, high risk environments, or high-risk breeds.

Vets should exercise their clinical judgement in the spirit of protecting human health and the government's instruction to people to stay at home and only travel if absolutely necessary. If the government extends the current restrictions beyond three weeks, we may need to revisit our advice.

Can I still do home visits?

Vets should only be delivering emergency treatment and urgent care and should be cancelling routine and non-urgent appointments, including routine and non-urgent appointments scheduled at the home of a client. Where emergency treatment and urgent care is required in a home setting, strict social distancing should be practised with all members of the household and PPE should be worn to manage the risks associated with environmental contamination eg. on household surfaces.

Before attending a client's home, you should ask if they, or a member of their household, are currently self-isolating or have tested positive for the virus. If this is the case, emergency care should be sought in a practice setting so that you do not have to enter a household where the virus may be present and there may be increased risk of environmental contamination. A friend or neighbour from an unaffected household should be encouraged to bring in the animal on behalf of the owner, or consider using a member of the practice staff to collect the pet from the household and return it, wearing appropriate PPE and following social distancing guidance.

Read the [APHA Briefing Note 10/20 Advice for Veterinarians and their Clients on Pets and COVID-19](#) for more detailed on guidance if you feel it is essential to carry out a home visit to a household with a suspected or confirmed case of Covid-19.

Will bTB testing continue?

OVs can continue with bTB testing across Great Britain for now, but only if it can be carried out safely under guidance relating to the Covid-19 pandemic. All vets must consider if social distancing can be maintained, and if it cannot the test should not be undertaken. APHA released a [TB testing briefing note](#) covering England and Wales and Scotland. In Northern Ireland the default position is that TB testing visits should no longer be carried out. Under exceptional circumstances, tests may continue if they can be done safely in accordance with the public health guidance.

Government support for businesses

What does key worker status mean, and do I qualify?

Parents whose work is critical to the COVID-19 response are considered to be 'key workers', which means their children can continue to be taken into school, providing they cannot be cared for safely at home. Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be. The government has granted key worker status by sector rather than profession. Farm vets and Official Veterinarians working in the food chain, including abattoir and other related inspection and certification work are included. We encourage you to carefully consider the wider societal picture and

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ensure that you only claim 'key worker' status if absolutely necessary. See [government advice on 'key workers'](#), and our [joint guidance](#) with RCVS, for more information.

What is furloughing and how does it work?

If you cannot cover staff costs due to COVID-19, you may be able to access the [Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme](#) to continue paying part of employees' wages. This would mean that employees are kept on the payroll, rather than being laid off. We expect the scheme to be up and running by the end of April.

Employers can use a portal to claim for 80% of furloughed employees' (employees on a leave of absence) usual monthly wage costs, up to £2,500 a month, plus the associated Employer National Insurance contributions and minimum automatic enrolment employer pension contributions on that wage. As an employer you can choose to fund the differences between this payment and the employee's salary.

The scheme is open to all UK employers that had created and started a PAYE payroll scheme on 28 February 2020 and have a UK bank account. Furloughed employees must have been on their employer's PAYE payroll on 28 February 2020, and can be on any type of contract, including:

- full-time employees
- part-time employees
- employees on agency contracts
- employees on flexible or zero-hour contracts

You can only submit one claim every 3 weeks, which is the minimum length an employee can be furloughed for. Claims can be backdated until the 1 March if applicable, and the scheme will run for at least 3 months. HMRC are currently setting up a system for reimbursement. Once more details of the system become known, we will provide an update. [Members can access the legal advice line for further information.](#)

We recognise that in order to make a rota system work, furloughing needs to be more flexible. In addition, if working staff become sick or need to self-isolate because someone in their household has symptoms, practices need to be able to bring back people from furlough. We are calling for greater flexibility on the 3-week furloughing period so that veterinary businesses can manage their rotas and teams.

Can I be furloughed if I am a locum or self-employed?

The [Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme](#) only covers employees. There is a separate [Self-employment Income Support Scheme](#) for the self-employed or members of a partnership. This scheme will allow you to claim a taxable grant worth 80% of your trading profits up to a maximum of £2,500 per month. HMRC will pay the grant directly into your bank account, in one instalment.

To qualify you must:

- have submitted your Income Tax Self-Assessment tax return for the tax year 2018-19. If you have not submitted, you must do this by 23 April 2020.
- have traded in the tax year 2019-20
- be trading when you apply, or would be except for COVID-19
- intend to continue to trade in the tax year 2020-21
- have lost trading/partnership trading profits due to COVID-19

Your self-employed trading profits must also be less than £50,000 and more than half of your income come from self-employment.

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You cannot apply for this scheme yet. HMRC will contact you if you are eligible for the scheme and invite you to apply online. HMRC are currently setting up a system for reimbursement. Once more details of the system become known, we will provide an update. The Chancellor has indicated that the system may not be up and running until June 2020.

Directors who pay themselves a salary and dividends through their own company are not covered by the scheme but if you are paid through PAYE you may be able to get support [using the Job Retention Scheme](#).

The government is also providing the following additional help for the self-employed:

- [deferral of Self Assessment income tax payments due in July 2020 and VAT payments due from 20 March 2020 until 30 June 2020](#)
- [grants for businesses that pay little or no business rates](#)
- increased amounts of [Universal Credit](#)
- [Business Interruption Loan Scheme](#)

What support is there for veterinary businesses?

The government has set out [a package of measures](#) to support businesses through this period. There are some different schemes available in [Scotland](#), [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#).

For veterinary practices this includes:

- a Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme
- deferring VAT and Income Tax payments
- a Statutory Sick Pay relief package for small and medium sized businesses
- small business grant funding of £10,000 for business in receipt of small business rate relief or rural rate relief
- the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme offering loans of up to £5 million for SMEs through the British Business Bank
- a new lending facility from the Bank of England to help support liquidity among larger firms, helping them bridge coronavirus disruption to their cash flows through loans
- the HMRC Time To Pay Scheme

However, not all schemes are available to veterinary practices. A business rates holiday for businesses in certain sectors does not apply. We have written to the Chancellor urging that these measures also be applied to veterinary businesses. [Read government support for businesses](#).

Medicines

Can I prescribe without seeing the patient?

Under normal circumstances the RCVS *Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons* does not allow veterinary surgeons to prescribe veterinary medicines (POM-Vs) without a physical examination of the animal(s) having first taken place. However, RCVS Council has decided that there should be a temporary departure from this position under the current exceptional circumstances. This position will continue to be reviewed on an ongoing basis and, in any event, no later than 30 June 2020. [Read the RCVS announcement](#).

What medicines can be posted?

The [Post Office provides guidance](#) on what prescription medicines can be sent through the post for medical purposes.

Should my practice be changing veterinary medicines ordering patterns/ stockpiling veterinary medicines?

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[NOAH](#) are encouraging vets and other prescribers and retailers of veterinary medicines to continue with normal ordering patterns to maintain appropriate and proportionate stocks of veterinary medicines. If this is undertaken, there should be no need for additional stocks.

Vulnerable groups

What is 'shielding' and am I in a vulnerable group?

Shielding is a measure to protect people who are clinically extremely vulnerable. This means minimising all interaction between those who are extremely vulnerable and others. The government is strongly advising people with serious underlying health conditions which put them at very high risk of severe illness from coronavirus to rigorously follow shielding measures in order to keep themselves safe. See [government advice on vulnerable groups and shielding](#). Please note that the NHS is notifying those in vulnerable groups by letter and text message.

I'm pregnant. What are the risks and what are my rights?

If you are pregnant you should not be required to come into work. It may be possible for you to do some work from home, for example triaging calls. If you are staying at home because of Covid-19 you can claim Statutory Sick Pay. To check your entitlement you should talk to your employer and check [government guidance](#). If your employer insists you come to work you can ask your GP to sign you off. BVA members can also speak to the [legal advice line](#), which is a free of charge service available 24/7. The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists provides [detailed advice on pregnancy and Covid-19](#).

Students

What do I do about EMS placements?

RCVS Council has agreed to temporarily suspend its requirements for UK veterinary students and veterinary degree programmes around extra-mural studies (EMS). Students should not be undertaking EMS placements at this time. See the [RCVS guidance](#) for more information.

What work do I give to the student on an EMS placement? Workplaces should no longer be accepting or continuing with EMS placements as RCVS Council has agreed to temporarily suspend its requirements. See the [RCVS guidance](#) for more information.

How do I fulfil my RVN training requirements? Veterinary nurse training requirements have also been suspended. See the [RCVS webpage](#) for more information.

Will I be able to graduate this year?

To allow students to graduate in light of suspended EMS placements, the RCVS have stated that "it may be necessary for UK veterinary schools to consider alternative methods to assess students in certain areas". See the [RCVS guidance](#) for more information. If you have any specific queries on examinations or curriculum requirements, please contact your vet school directly.

Will I be able to get a job after graduating?

We recognise this is a worrying time for students due to graduate this year and we will review the situation as it unfolds. In the meantime, if you need to speak to someone in confidence Vetlife Helpline is available 24/7 every day

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of the year, on 0303 040 2551 or you can send an anonymous email via the [website](#). Anyone concerned about their financial situation should also read about the [Government financial support measures](#).

Mental Health

How do I protect my mental wellbeing at this difficult time?

Take a look at the [Vetlife website](#) for tips on self-care. Charities such as [Mind](#) also have helpful tips on maintaining positive mental wellbeing.

What do I do if I have a concern about my own, or a colleague's mental health?

Take a look at the [Vetlife website](#) for tips on dealing with stress, anxiety and depression. If you need to speak to someone in confidence Vetlife Helpline is available 24 hours a day, everyday of the year, on 0303 040 2551 or you can send an anonymous email via the [website](#). Support is also available via [Vet Support NI](#) and [Vet Support Scotland](#).

How you can help

How can I help support the NHS?

The most important thing you can do to prevent the spread of Covid-19 and support our colleagues in the NHS is observe strict social distancing measures, and ensure that this is applied, as far as reasonably practicable, when carrying out essential veterinary work. [Read government guidance](#).

If you have ventilators, monitors, or anaesthetic machines which you're willing to lend to the NHS, or PPE which you can donate, please register your interest [here](#).

You can sign up to be a [NHS Volunteer Responder](#) to support the 1.5m people in England who are at most risk from the virus to stay well. [Find out more information and sign up](#)

How can I support the veterinary profession?

Consider whether you could provide emergency accommodation for veterinary colleagues. Find out more via [UK Vets in COVID-19 Crisis Connection Accommodation introductory service](#).

How can I help support food production?

If you've worked as a red or white meat Official Veterinarian or Meat Hygiene Inspector within the last five years, your skills are needed now to support food production during the Covid-19 crisis. If you think you can help please contact: jon.stanford@eandj.co.uk in England/Wales, operations@fss.scot in Scotland, and VSAHG.BMBEEmployeeRelations@daera-ni.gov.uk in Northern Ireland. It's important that we work together to help keep the abattoirs open at this critical time.

Animal owners

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Can I still take my animal to the vet?

Government advice states that [all non-essential vet visits should be avoided](#) and you must phone your vet to arrange the best approach to meet your pets' needs.

Veterinary practices are remaining open to focus on emergency care and urgent treatment for animals. Vets should be cancelling all routine and non-emergency appointments however they can still triage cases and provide advice remotely. Please contact your veterinary practice directly via telephone for further information.

Where your animal does have to see the vet for emergency care or urgent treatment, [please observe strict social distancing measures](#). [Download the FECAVA Infographic for pet owners](#) visiting their vet during the COVID-19 outbreak for some top tips on how to protect yourself and your veterinary practice.

Can my animal be infected with, and spread, the coronavirus?

There is currently no evidence to suggest that companion animals can be infected with or spread the Covid-19 virus that is affecting humans. There is some evidence to suggest that the virus can be carried on their fur for short periods of time, just as other surfaces can carry the virus from one place to another. So, it's important to practise good hand hygiene and wash your hands thoroughly (for 20 seconds with soap and water) after touching your pet and avoid being licked by them.

Can I still walk my dog?

Current Government advice states that all households must stay at home and only leave to buy essential supplies or exercise once a day. You can walk your dog in accordance with this guidance eg. if you live on your own you can walk your dog as part of taking exercise once a day, or if you live in a household of two people you can walk your dog twice a day if each of you goes out separately. Strict social distancing guidance should be followed.

During the pandemic and government restrictions your dog may be getting less exercise than usual, [read these top tips from Blue Cross on how to keep your dog mentally stimulated](#).

How can I walk someone else's dog safely?

You should only be walking someone else's dog if, due to their individual circumstances, they are unable to do so themselves. This includes people who are key workers (NHS staff or similar), [shielded](#) (at particular risk from Coronavirus) or the [vulnerable and over 70s](#) or people from a [self-isolating household confirmed or suspected of having Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).

[Read the Canine and Feline Sector Group's practical advice on how to walk someone else's dog safely](#)

How should I care for my animal if I am self-isolating or social distancing?

The following useful guidance documents have been produced for animal owners:

- The Canine and Feline Sector Group has issued [guidance to owners](#) on how to look after their pets during the current COVID-19 crisis.
- [Read UK Government advice for pet owners and livestock keepers on maintaining the welfare of their animals during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#).
- [The Scottish Government has also produced Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): advice to owners of companion animals and livestock](#)

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What fees should my practice be charging over this period?

[RCVS supporting guidance](#) notes that a veterinary surgeon is entitled to charge a fee for the provision of services. Fees charged during this period might change to reflect the costs associated with providing an essential service under social distancing requirements. As always, all pricing practices should comply with the [Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008](#) and other consumer protection legislation. Clients should be provided with clear and easy to understand information about how fees are calculated and what is being charged for.

What about Canine Health Schemes?

Veterinary practices are currently unable to provide a radiography service for the Hip and Elbow Dysplasia Schemes. The Hip and Elbow Dysplasia scoring and grading sessions have also been placed on hold as staff and scrutineers are required to remain at home.

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