

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
Department of Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU  
E: [mb-sofs@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:mb-sofs@dhsc.gov.uk)

10 June 2020

Dear Secretary of State

### **Contact tracing and the veterinary profession**

By way of introduction, BVA is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom, with over 18,000 members. Our primary aim is to represent, support and champion the interests of the veterinary profession in this country, and we therefore take a keen interest in all issues affecting the profession, including animal health and welfare, public health, research, regulatory issues and employment matters.

The veterinary profession has already done a huge amount to slow the spread of Covid-19 and keep staff and clients safe, and we are now urging veterinary practices to comply with the test and trace programmes. However, we know from dialogue with our members that many veterinary teams are understandably anxious about what it could mean for service provision and animal health and welfare if a colleague were to test positive.

The way vets work together in clinical practice means close contact is inevitable and, with that, comes the reality of whole teams having to self-isolate. It is an understandable ask given the severity of the public health challenge, but one that we fear could have a serious impact on the profession's ability to continue to deliver veterinary services throughout the UK.

BVA has issued regular guidance to the profession throughout the pandemic, and our current advice is for veterinary professionals to keep working in fixed pairs or small teams, and to continue supporting neighbouring practices, for example by stepping in and helping if teams are short-staffed due to self-isolation. However, a particular worry has been raised by colleagues in rural and remote areas, often in very small practices, who may have no other practices in their area that they can call on for support.

We have been asked by members whether veterinary professionals need to self-isolate if they have been wearing PPE during the 15+ minutes of contact with an infected person.

BVA's understanding of the contact tracing systems is that, as it stands, they are not flexible enough to take these details into account. Our concern in terms of impacts on the veterinary profession is that contact tracing call handlers will not be able to talk through the different levels of risk associated with different types of PPE and the algorithms of the system will only be able to look at the basic information.

**British Veterinary Association**  
Patron: Her Majesty The Queen

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7 Mansfield Street, London W1G 9NQ  
T 020 7636 6541 E [bvahq@bva.co.uk](mailto:bvahq@bva.co.uk)  
W [www.bva.co.uk](http://www.bva.co.uk)

**We are therefore asking governments, as a matter of urgency, to alter the system so that people working in a veterinary context are considered in a similar vein as those working in human healthcare settings, schools, and prisons. In the English system these are the 'Tier 1' calls, which are handled by local public health experts, thereby allowing for more nuanced discussions with people who would understand our clinical ways of working and how to assess the level of risk if a contact has been with colleagues who have been wearing PPE.**

**We are also asking for veterinary professionals to be amongst those who are prioritised for access to the additional testing as it is rolled out. This would enable those who are self-isolating but not infected to get out of self-isolation quickly and return to the practice rota.**

These relatively simple steps could be the difference between a practice effectively having to shut down – potentially depriving a local area of vital veterinary services for two weeks – or being able to remain open, while still prioritising colleague and client safety.

We look forward to hearing from you. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me via [publicaffairs@bva.co.uk](mailto:publicaffairs@bva.co.uk) if you have any questions or would like to discuss this further.

Yours sincerely



**Daniella Dos Santos**  
**President**

cc Rt Hon George Eustice MP, Secretary of State Defra  
Professor Christine Middlemiss, Chief Veterinary Officer

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W [www.bva.co.uk](http://www.bva.co.uk)