

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

This BVA guidance is intended to support veterinary practices to work safely during Covid-19.

It recognises that that each individual veterinary practice will need to have their own systems in place depending on local circumstances and that practices will need to work in line with national and devolved legislation and local guidance. It will remain in place for as long as necessary in line with government advice.

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

### Government restrictions across the UK

During November the UK faced a second wave of the pandemic and the four nations of the UK put in place new rules and restrictions. Across the UK veterinary practices have been able to remain open.

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 2m distancing will not always be possible between team members. Including:
  - 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
- 2. Prioritising cases:** Each veterinary practice will need to work at their own pace, based on their available resources and the extent to which they can adapt their workplace or working practices. Practices will need to assess and prioritise veterinary caseloads, including cases that have not been seen during the lockdowns, and manage how to deliver services. Prioritising must be based on clinical and professional judgement for animal health and welfare and public health, and practices may want to take a phased approach to

undertaking this work.

3. **New ways of working:** Individual consults and procedures may take longer than they used to in order to practise social/physical distancing. Practices should consider how to charge appropriately for their professional time, including for remote consultations, and how to communicate this to clients.
4. **Prudent use of resources:** Veterinary professionals should continue to be mindful of the prudent use of resources, such as medical PPE and oxygen, if supplies are limited. (See section on PPE and face coverings below.)
5. **Supporting colleagues:** Practices who have staff returning from self-isolation or furlough should provide return-to-work meetings to support staff in understanding any changes to previous ways of working, including social/physical distancing measures and the use of technology for remote consultations. Employers should be aware of the importance of supporting all employees' mental health and wellbeing at times of change and uncertainty. 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 and PPE

### Face coverings in veterinary practice:

Members of the public are required to wear face coverings inside veterinary practices. For staff the rules vary across the UK: in Scotland and Wales it is mandatory for staff to wear face coverings; in England vet practices are not explicitly listed but employers should assess the use; and in Northern Ireland it's not mandatory where social distancing can be maintained, but it is advised. For more information, see the [BVA advice for veterinary professionals](#).

**PPE:** RCVS Knowledge has produced excellent [guidance on the use of PPE in veterinary practice during the Covid-19 pandemic](#) (updated 15 May 2020). You can also watch the RCVS Knowledge webinars on infection control and biosecurity in practice: [Part 1 \(recorded 27 March\)](#) and [Part 2 \(recorded 30 April\)](#).

## BVA Guidelines for safe working in veterinary workplaces

1. **Undertake a risk assessment for your workplace and any on-site visits**
  - Involve colleagues, as far as possible, to help the whole team understand the risks and mitigating actions.
2. **Minimise client contact as much as possible and manage their expectations:**
  - Risk assess all in-person work.

- Clarify the client's medical status with regard to Covid-19 before booking any appointments.
- Advise owners coming into the practice (eg for a euthanasia) on what to expect, including that it may look and feel different to normal due to social distancing measures.
- Only allow one client per animal, where possible.
- Remind clients that they are required to wear a face covering when inside the practice, unless they are exempt for health reasons
- Consider asking clients to wait outside the consult room and, if necessary, outside the premises.
- Obtain histories and discuss and agree treatment plans remotely.
- Use technology to triage and consult whenever possible and appropriate.
- Consider remote prescribing in line with [RCVS guidance](#) (Note: this guidance has been reviewed and updated).
- Obtain payment remotely.
- 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](#).

**3. All staff who can work from home should continue to work from home at this time.** This could include:

- Administrative staff.
- Vets and nurses carrying out triage and remote consultations from home, if appropriate.
- Enabling working from home by people who are self-isolating and those who are clinically vulnerable, if appropriate.

**4. Minimise staff contact in the workplace as much as possible:**

- Stagger arrival, departure, and break times.
- Reduce congestion, for example, by having more and separate entry and exit points to the workplace.
- Work in consistent pairs or small teams, if possible, for those who need to work in close proximity, for example, work that involves lifting or restraining animals and surgical procedures.
- Allocate teams to specific workspaces (such as consult rooms and theatres) and avoid sharing equipment where possible, such as pens, stethoscopes, and otoscopes.
- Don't share food and other provisions.

**5. Follow all hygiene and biosecurity measures:**

- Provide hand washing facilities (or hand sanitiser if washing is not possible) at all entry and exit points and in vehicles.
- Thoroughly clean equipment and work areas after each use.
- Follow [RCVS Knowledge PPE advice](#).
- Wash uniforms regularly (if possible, launder them at work) and don't wear them travelling to or from home.

**6. Re-think the physical space and layout:**

- Consider the layout of workspaces, if possible, to allow people to work further apart from one another.
- Create additional space by using any parts of the premises freed up by remote working.
- Use floor tape or paint to mark areas to help staff and clients keep to a 2m distance, where possible.
- Install screens to protect workers in reception areas or similar spaces.

- Define the number of clients that can reasonably follow 2m social distancing within the space, where possible. Take into account total floorspace as well as likely pinch points and busy areas.
- Ensure ventilation systems are serviced and in working order.
- Use outside areas for queuing where available and safe, eg car parks, but be aware of the impact on public spaces.
- Put in place pick-up and drop-off collection points, where possible, rather than passing goods such as medications hand-to-hand.
- *For further advice and guidance see also the 'Covid-19 Secure' guidelines on [shops and branches](#) and [offices](#) (applicability is England only but the generic advice may be useful across the UK).*

## 7. Risk assess and plan ahead for home visits:

- For all home visits:
  - Discuss plans in advance with householders to confirm how you intend to work. Make sure they understand the social distancing and hygiene measures that need to be followed and manage their expectations.
  - Minimise contact with the client and where face-to-face interaction is required, then this should only be with one person per visit. Ask the client to secure the animal ahead of the visit.
  - Ask householders to leave all internal doors open to minimise contact with door handles.
  - Use a fixed pairing system if you have to work in close proximity.
  - Allocate the same person to the same household if multiple visits are required.
- When visiting a household where someone is clinically vulnerable (but has not been asked to shield):
  - Make arrangements to avoid any face-to-face contact.
  - Be particularly strict about handwashing and other hygiene measures.
- If you are requested to assist with an animal in an infected or suspected household:
  - Follow [RCVS advice](#) and [APHA advice](#)
  - There is no expectation that vets should attend an infected or suspected household, in line with the RCVS Code supporting guidance (3.37f and 3.43)
  - Wear appropriate PPE
  - Mitigate the risks, for example, by arranging to see the animal outside the home, ie in a garden or garage.
- *For further advice and guidance see also the 'Covid-19 Secure' guidelines on [working in other people's homes](#) (applicability is England only but the generic advice may be useful across the UK).*

## 8. Risk assess and plan ahead for farm and yard visits:

- Maintain safe working practices around large animals and consider taking a second member of practice staff to assist. If two members of staff must travel to a site, consider travelling in separate vehicles or fixed pairings.
- Use a consistent pairing or team system.
- Risk assess and plan ahead. Clarify the client's medical status with regard to Covid-19 before booking appointments. Make sure your client understands the social distancing measures you will be putting in place and knows how you intend to work. In cases where clients are self-isolating or confirmed to have Covid-19, they should not be involved in the visit at all.
- Where possible, examine animals outside in the open air, rather than in an enclosed airspace.
- Maintain a physical distance of 2m from other people as much as possible.
- Make sure you follow your usual biosecurity practices, including wearing clean protective clothing and disinfecting between clients.

- Consider sedating animals needing treatment or investigation where appropriate, especially if this helps maintain the 2m physical distance from the handler.
- Minimise contact with the client, and where face-to-face interaction is required, this should only be with one person per visit.
- Do not enter the farmhouse or any other residential area for any reason and do not accept any drinks or food.
- Make sure no one else enters your vehicle during the visit (for example to collect equipment).
- *For further advice and guidance see also the 'Covid-19 Secure' guidelines on [working outdoors](#) (applicability is England only but the generic advice may be useful across the UK).*

#### **9. Minimise the risks of vehicle sharing**

- Avoid multiple occupancy vehicles if possible.
- If more than one person needs to travel to a client, the following should be encouraged:
  - Use a fixed pairing system – journeys should be with the same individuals and limited in the number of people travelling per vehicle.
  - Maximise space between occupants, for example sitting in diagonally opposite seats.
  - Maintaining good ventilation, for example, keeping windows open and passengers facing away from one another to reduce risk of transmission.
  - Vehicles regularly cleaned using standard cleaning products, with emphasis on handles and other areas where passengers may touch surfaces.
  - Wash hands before getting into the vehicle and on arrival at the visit. Keep hand sanitiser/wipes within vehicles to clean hands after each visit.

**For the latest BVA updates please visit: [www.bva.co.uk/coronavirus](http://www.bva.co.uk/coronavirus)**

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