

BVA guidance for the national lockdowns

Covid 19, and the spread of the new variant, is a gravely serious public health crisis and we must all do everything we can to stop the spread of the disease.

Veterinary practices and professionals have a moral and professional duty to work safely, to keep colleagues and clients safe, and to encourage animal owners to respect the strong 'stay at home' message from government.

Veterinary work to support the food supply chain can continue to go ahead, as long as it is done safely, as with the first UK-wide lockdown. All other veterinary work should be **limited to what is essential for animal health and welfare** within the timeframe of the lockdown.

BVA is therefore advising veterinary teams as follows:

1. **Do not continue with business as usual** – we've all adapted our ways of working throughout the pandemic but the latest developments in this crisis require everyone to adapt again to reduce the spread of Covid.
2. **Review all protocols for working safely** – the new strain of Covid 19 is reported to be more transmissible so teams need to redouble their safety measures. Work with your whole team to discuss and agree how to implement safety measures including 2m physical distancing, the use of PPE, and managing clients. Regularly remind colleagues to practise good biosecurity at all times. You may find our more detailed [advice and guidance on working safely](#) helpful.
3. **Delay any work that does not fit the criteria in the [RCVS flowchart](#)** which clearly asks you to consider whether the case is an emergency, whether it can be supported remotely first, or whether it will have animal health and welfare or public health implications if you do not see it during lockdown. This will mean delaying some routine work that can wait. For some practices this may mean a return to emergency-only work, due to lack of capacity within the team.
4. **Only see patients in-person if there is a real animal health and welfare need now** – use your clinical judgement and continue to reassess cases taking into account the length of the lockdown. You may find it helpful to refer to previous BVA guidance on what constitutes essential animal welfare which was developed earlier in the pandemic.
5. **Limit all in-person contact with clients** – use remote consultations, where appropriate, and re-consider whether it is safe to allow clients into the building making sure you can maintain 2m physical distancing at all times.
6. **Reduce in-person contact with colleagues** – work in fixed pairs or small teams, where possible, and reconsider rota patterns to stagger arrivals and breaks. Do not share food/drinks.
7. **Support colleagues to work from home** – for example, administrative teams and veterinary colleagues undertaking phone/remote consults.
8. **Support colleagues with caring responsibilities** – school closures will cause extreme difficulties for parents/carers and employers should consider the use of flexible working patterns or furlough to support colleagues, where possible.
9. **Support mental health and wellbeing** – we all have a duty to support the health and wellbeing of our colleagues. 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](#).
10. **Support 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.

Why are we not reverting to emergency-only?

Both BVA and the RCVS agreed that it was not necessary to return to emergency-only (as we saw in the initial three weeks of first UK lockdown in March 2020) because we are in a very different place to where we were last March when we didn't know if practices could stay open and we didn't have safe working protocols in place.

We're also mindful that many practices are under enormous pressure because they haven't been able to catch up on the work from earlier lockdowns and this has put huge strain onto exhausted teams. Restricting to emergency-only for the expected timeframe of these new national lockdowns (at least several weeks) could exacerbate this pressure further. However, we also know that some practices will need to make those restrictions due to staff shortages.

But this is not business as usual. The services veterinary practices are providing should only be those that we consider as **essential for animal health and welfare in the timeframe of the lockdown** (and/or essential for the food chain in large animal practice).

Relevant government guidance for reference:

- **England:** The [UK government](#) put England into national lockdown from 4 January. It has stated that in England a reasonable excuse for leaving home is: "for animal welfare reasons, such as to attend veterinary services for advice or treatment."
- **Scotland:** Scottish Government announced mainland Scotland and Skye would move from level 4 to lockdown from 5 January. The Scottish CVO team has advised BVA and the RCVS that "Veterinary services can remain open. They should plan for the minimum number of people needed on site to operate safely and effectively." Some Scottish islands remain at level 3 and should follow the relevant RCVS and government guidance.
- **Northern Ireland:** The Northern Ireland Executive [announced new restrictions](#) on 5 January. Detailed regulations are being drafted.
- **Wales:** Wales is currently under alert level 4 restrictions and members in Wales should continue to follow the [RCVS flowchart for Wales](#).

For more information and answers to frequently asked questions please visit the BVA coronavirus information hub:

www.bva.co.uk/coronavirus