

For veterinarians: COVID-19 and Companion Animals

Veterinarians play an important role in safeguarding animal health and public health. As a medical profession and understanding how the disease spreads, veterinarians should actively communicate the importance of social distancing and to educate them on why “business-as-usual” services could not be provided at this point in time.

Veterinarians should play their part by ensuring that they do not compromise the national effort of slowing the spread of COVID-19, while providing veterinary services to their clients and their animals.

1. Can house-call services be provided to premises of people under QO/SHN/LOA?

House-calls are permitted to premises of people under Leave of Absence (LOA) if it is not feasible for the pet to be transported to the veterinary clinic.

Veterinarians should conduct tele-triage (e.g. via consultation over the phone or internet) prior to any house-calls, make all reasonable attempts to maintain safe distancing measures (e.g. contactless consults, payments, etc) and to minimise time spent in the client’s residence. Veterinarians are strongly encouraged to utilise appropriate PPE based on risk assessment and follow MOH guidelines on hygiene during and after the consultation.

For premises of people under Quarantine Order (QO)/Stay Home Notice (SHN), visitors are not allowed to enter, including for the provision of house-call veterinary services. Veterinarians can consider alternatives such as telemedicine, arranging to pick up the animal outside these premises with no contact, or performing a kerbside consult outside these premises, if safe and appropriate (please refer to Question 2).

2. Can a pet of a residence under QO/SHN/LOA be picked up outside the premises with no contact?

Yes. If the pet has to be transported to a veterinary clinic or other facilities, this can be done in a way to minimise contact between people. A suitable drop off location should be arranged (e.g. front door or gate), while the staff receiving the pet should be in appropriate PPE. The pet and associated cages and/or accessories should be considered potential sources of contamination and should be cleaned and decontaminated appropriately.

3. What is the advice to COVID-19 patients or persons under QO/SHN/LOA with pets?

Veterinarians should remind pet owners to continue to care for their pets and adopt good hygiene practices such as washing their hands with soap before and after interacting with their pets. Persons who are unwell should limit their contact with pets as well as other people. During this period, pet owners can arrange for other family members or friends to take care of the pet until the person recovers. If pets are observed to be unwell and the owners are unable to leave the house, they should seek help from another member of the household or their friends to bring the pets for veterinary treatment.

4. What precautions should veterinary staff take when handling pets belonging to COVID-19 patients in the clinic?

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and other national animal health organisations have maintained that, to date, there is no evidence that companion animals, including pets, play a role in the spread of the disease to humans.

Nonetheless, a precautionary approach should be adopted. These pets should be appropriately isolated from other pets with good biosecurity measures in place.

When handling and caring for pets, good hygiene should always be implemented such as washing hands with soap before and after interacting with animals, their food, waste, or supplies. Staff in contact with the pet should be in appropriate PPE based on a risk assessment of the situation (e.g. type of contact with the pet) or procedure being performed. The pet and associated cages and/or accessories should be considered potential sources of contamination and should be cleaned and decontaminated appropriately. Disposable, single-use PPE (e.g. disposable gowns, gloves, surgical masks) should not be reused. Protective eyewear (e.g. goggles) should be decontaminated after each use.

Examples of PPE to be used for different scenarios:

Scenarios	Suggested PPE
Basic handling of animal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disposable gown• Gloves• Surgical mask
Close contact with animal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disposable gown• Gloves• Surgical mask• Eye protection
Procedures that may potentially involve contact with aerosols (e.g. intubation, working around the patient's face)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Disposable gown• Gloves• N95 mask• Eye protection

5. Which types of disinfectants should I use for surfaces after handling pets belonging to COVID-19 patients?

Disinfectants such as diluted bleach solution (dilute 1000ppm or 0.1% sodium hypochlorite; bleach solution with 5.25-6.00% sodium hypochlorite can be diluted with 1 part bleach in 49 parts water) and 70% ethanol can be used. Thorough cleaning (e.g. removal of organic matter) should be performed before the use of disinfectants. More information on cleaning instructions, types of disinfectants which are effective, and contact times, can be found on NEA's website (<https://nea.gov.sg/our-services/public-cleanliness/environmental-cleaning-guidelines>).

6. Can pet owners visit their pets hospitalised at the veterinary clinic during this period?

During this period, veterinary clinics should discourage visits by pet owners where possible by explaining to pet owners the importance of social distancing. Where visits are necessary, additional measures should be put in place to adhere to the necessary safe distancing measures. Clinics should also consider offering clients alternative options such as video-calls to allow owners to check on their animals remotely.

The SVA has developed a set of recommendations for enhanced safe distancing measures for veterinarians. Veterinarians are encouraged to refer to these guidelines and adopt it accordingly for their practices.