
This document consists of recommendations from the Rhode Island Veterinary Medical Association (RIVMA), as compiled from various sources. Veterinarians are strongly encouraged to continue to use their professional judgement to balance the need for treatment of their patients with the associated risk to the health of the client and the practice team.

Resources
AVMA COVID-19 Resources
https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19

Rhode Island Department of Health
https://health.ri.gov/covid/

OSHA Guidelines on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19

CDC COVID-19 General Business FAQs

Protocols
PPE
All veterinary team members should continue to wear a mask, disposable exam gloves and dedicated work clothing (scrubs, lab coat) that can be laundered daily. In addition, veterinary practices should require clients to wear masks whenever they come into contact with veterinary team members. Please note that the wearing of a mask does not eliminate the need to follow social distancing protocols.

Social Distancing
Social distancing is the reduction of closeness and duration of any required contact with another person. In order to reduce COVID-19 transmission, the ideal distance between any two people should be 6’ at any time. Veterinary team members should continue to keep a safe distance from pet owners, as they pose the greatest risk of COVID-19 exposure. Measures to contain this contact include:

- Curbside transfer of pets with little or no contact with owners. Use of PPE is recommended at all times, even when social distancing protocols are followed.
o Contactless patient drop-off and return through leaving carriers or attaching leashes to secure hooks in unoccupied entrances.

o Use of telemedicine.

o Limiting situations where clients enter the facility. When clients must enter the building, a pre-planned approach should be used to determine where the client will be and what PPE will be worn by all individuals. Clients should be required to wear a mask.

o Euthanasia appointments should be structured so that time in close proximity to the client is minimized.

o Documentation of verbal consent for treatment rather than requiring signatures.

o Using contactless, electronic payment.

o Having veterinary team members to perform some tasks remotely, to limit the number of people in the clinic (i.e. telemedicine appointments, telephone follow-ups, medical record updates, management activities).

If you decide to allow clients to enter your practice, the following should be taken into consideration:

o Waiting room use and layout. Waiting areas should allow for 6’ distancing between clients. Exam rooms should provide adequate space between clients and staff.

o Developing, implementing and enforcing maximum waiting room occupancy numbers.

o Reviewing scheduling practices to avoid waiting area congestion.

o Installation of clear partitions in reception areas to protect front office staff.

o Adding floor signage to maintain distancing while waiting at reception areas.

o Reviewing client flow to minimize situations where paths will cross with personnel or other clients.

Distancing of clinic staff should also be followed. This can include:

o Maintaining 6’ distancing between team members whenever feasible. Clinic layout and operations should be reviewed to facilitate separation (seating arrangement in reception areas, offices, meeting/break rooms, separation of procedure or treatment areas in common treatment rooms).
o Advance planning for procedures that will require close contact of team members (e.g. blood collection, catheter placement) to minimize the contact time.

o Efficient performing of procedures that require team members to be in close contact with one another.

o Maintaining some use of curbside drop-off and pickup (animals and supplies) to limit the number of people in the clinic.

o An additional consideration is distancing from other people that may visit the clinic, such as couriers. A clinic-based approach to receipt of goods should be in place to minimize contact and protect staff. This can include having contactless deliveries made by depositing goods inside a door with no one around or dropping items off outside the clinic. Signatures should be avoided as much as possible, and masks worn for any required contact. Good hand hygiene practices should be used after contact with items handled by external individuals.

Working in Teams or Pods
In order to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection, some practices may have divided their staff into small groups that always work the same shifts. This ensures that, if an employee tests positive for COVID-19, the practice would not need to close, as only the members of their small group/ those who they had close contact with would be required to quarantine. It is recommended that this practice continue in the near future.

Alternate Service Delivery
Even as restrictions decrease, it is still important to reduce the number of clients visits the clinic when possible. As a result, the use of telemedicine will likely continue in the near future. It is recommended that veterinary clinics implement telemedicine as needed. The RIVMA will continue to keep veterinarians apprised of any changes to regulations relating to the use of telemedicine.

Food/Medication Delivery
Veterinarians should continue to reduce the need for pet owners to visit veterinary practices by promoting ways to ship/deliver food, medication or other supplies. If a client must visit to pick up food or medication, contact-free procedures should be used. (examples: staff places items in clients’ trunk while they stay in the car; staff places order in a set location where client can pick up). Pre-order and pre-payment should always be required.

Client Screening
Clinic staff should continue to ask all pet owners standard health questions prior to setting any appointments. While this does not eliminate risk, as some infected individuals may be asymptomatic, it does reduce risk.
Self-Monitoring
Veterinary team members should monitor their own health and stay home if they feel sick. While the symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, chills, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea) are similar to many other illnesses, team members should err on the side of caution. For more information about testing in the state of RI: https://health.ri.gov/covid/testing/

In the event that a staff member tests positive for COVID-19, a veterinary practice must:
- Notify all team members that were exposed and send them home to quarantine for 14 days. HIPAA guidelines should be followed to protect team members’ privacy.
- Close the clinic to disinfect

Cleaning and Disinfection
Veterinary practices should continue to disinfect all exam rooms prior to opening, in between each patient and after the last patient of the day with an EPA registered hospital disinfectant. Manufacturer’s instructions should be followed when using all cleaning products.

Doorknobs, light switches, countertops, chairs, file cabinets, phones, and other equipment must be wiped down frequently.

Hand sanitizer should be available for staff/client use.

Shared bathrooms should be cleaned and disinfected frequently. A log should be used to track cleanings.