

Guidance for Animal Shelters Regarding Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The statewide “stay home” Executive Order No. 20-16 issued by Governor Laura Kelly on March 28 established that only those individuals or entities which are performing essential activities are exempt from the order. Animal shelters serve to protect animal health as well as community health and safety, thereby they qualify as essential activities under the Keeping Essential Functions Framework 400(9)(g).

The Kansas Department of Agriculture recognizes the critical role that animal shelters play in our communities. **However, managers of animal shelters must — to the extent possible without significant disruption to essential functions — make operational changes to protect staff and clients.** At this time, the decision whether to stay open or to close — and details about how to limit the services you are providing — is up to each individual shelter. Shelters that do remain open must follow protective measures.

Protect Employees and Volunteers

There is no evidence that companion animals can spread COVID-19 or that infection would be serious for them. The virus spreads primarily from person to person. The health and safety of employees and volunteers should be the focus of every animal shelter.

- Limit staff to essential employees only, to minimize human-to-human interaction.
- Employees and volunteers who are sick or who have been exposed to COVID-19 should not work.
- Wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water before eating, after using the bathroom, coughing or sneezing, and touching surfaces. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available and there is no visible dirt on your hands.
- Frequently sanitize common areas with EPA-registered antimicrobial products for use against COVID-19 that are safe to use in and around the animals and shelter.

Support and Inform Your Community

- Remind community members to have a plan in place for pets.
- Identify a family member/friend who can care for pets if needed.
- Have crates, food, and extra supplies on hand for quick movement of pets.
- Keep all animal vaccines up to date and document all medications and dosing
- Pets should have ID: collar with ID tag and microchip (best practice is microchipping).

Prepare Shelter for Increased Intake

While mass intake is not likely, people who contract the virus and are hospitalized may not have someone to care for their pets. Steps to prepare include:

- Free up shelter capacity with increased adoption effort, rescue partners, and foster homes for animals already at the shelter.
- Prepare a facility plan with your shelter veterinarian on intake and isolation protocols.
- Be prepared to identify, isolate, or divert animals that may have been exposed to COVID-19. This includes securing disinfectants and personal protective equipment that may be used safely around animals. Identify locations available for fostering, identify capacity needs, and maintain an updated list.
- Have a written protocol in place to follow and provide regular staff updates to staff.
- Secure additional food/supplies for increased intake, including foster network needs.
- Check availability of volunteers who can assist in a staff shortage.
- Connect with local boarding facilities, surrounding shelters and rescues and communicate plans.

For current information about COVID-19, and to sign up for updates, go to the KDHE COVID-19 Resource Center at www.kdhe.ks.gov/coronavirus.