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Memo

To: Maryland Veterinary Licensees
From: Elizabeth D Callahan DVM DACT DABVP
President, Maryland State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners
Re: COVID-19 and Veterinary Practices
Date: March 22, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

The last week has been very stressful for many veterinary practices with the COVID-19 situation changing very rapidly, sometimes from hour to hour. At the beginning of the week, we were unsure if Governor Hogan would order veterinary practices to close or modify their businesses. As of right now, all veterinary practices are considered essential and have the *option* to remain open. The decision whether to stay open or to close – whether to limit the services you are providing or not – is up to each individual practice. That may change in the future, but as I write this, those decisions can be made by each individual practice.

To stay informed with the most up to date information, I recommend you check in at least daily with the [Maryland Department of Health COVID website](#), [Governor Hogan's COVID website](#), and the [CDC's COVID-19 website](#).

For practices that do remain open, there are steps you can and should take to help ensure that your employees and your clients remain safe and healthy. It is imperative that you read and follow the [CDC guidelines](#) for prevention. For specific information about veterinary practices, the [American Veterinary Medical Association](#) and the [American Hospital Association](#) have excellent information on their websites for all veterinarians. If you are not currently following these guidelines, I strongly suggest that you do so immediately.

Information about COVID-19 is ever evolving, but we do know that the best way to avoid becoming ill is to avoid exposure to the virus. Recommendations that everyone should follow include:

- Avoid close contact and stay about 6 feet away from other people;
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth;
- Cover coughs or sneezes with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash;
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing, going to the bathroom, and before eating (if soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol); and
- Stay home when they are sick.

AVMA Recommendations for veterinary practices include the following:

- Surfaces in the veterinary clinic/hospital that are touched frequently, such as workstations, keyboards, doorknobs, countertops, and stethoscopes, should be cleaned often and wiped down by employees with disposable wipes between cleanings.

- Provide no-touch disposal receptacles.
- Place hand sanitizers in multiple locations, including in exam rooms, offices, and conference rooms to encourage hand hygiene
- Veterinary healthcare team members who have symptoms of acute respiratory illness should stay at home and should not return to work until they are free of fever (fever is defined as a temperature of 100.4F or higher, using an oral thermometer), signs of a fever, and any other symptoms for at least 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing or other symptom-altering medicine (e.g., cough suppressants).
- Team members who appear to have symptoms of acute respiratory illness upon arrival at work or who become sick during the day should be separated from other team members and sent home immediately.
- If a team member is confirmed to have COVID-19, the veterinary practice owner should inform other team members of their possible exposure to COVID-19, but maintain confidentiality as required by law. Team members who are exposed to another employee with confirmed COVID-19 should contact their physician or local health department to determine how best to proceed. It is possible that public health officials may ask that the veterinary practice be temporarily closed for personnel isolation and disinfection.

Although there are no directives specific to veterinary practices, we recommend that all elective surgeries and procedures be postponed in consideration of the expected shortages in Personal Protective Equipment due to the unprecedented and expected demand in the human medical field. Elective procedures are generally those that can be delayed for a minimum of three months without undue risk to the current or future health of the patient.

When you do see clients:

- Be strategic in the use of personal protective equipment (PPE), including masks, gowns, and gloves.
- Consider meeting clients with ill animals at their cars, rather than having them bring those animals into your waiting room. When meeting clients, as a precaution, veterinary team members should maintain appropriate distance as possible and wear appropriate PPE. Consider the use of telephone to gather information on history and clinical signs and to conduct follow-up consultations. This should reduce risk for both veterinary team members and clients, as human-to-human contact is still believed to be the primary mode of transmission.

Although the situations is very fluid, there is one thing we are certain of – these are extraordinary times and it is clear you need to operate differently. If you are not, consider the liabilities you may be inviting if one of your employees gets ill and you did nothing to prevent it. Likewise, if you work in a practice that isn't taking adequate precautions, you should speak up. Your life may depend upon it.

All of us at the State Board are happy to address your questions and concerns as best we can. Just know that we have many different types and sizes of practices in Maryland, and there is no one recommendation we can issue that will cover all of them. If you implement the protocols in your practice that allow you to adhere to the CDC guidelines, we will have the best chance of staying safe and healthy. For question, you can contact me at: Elizabeth.callahan@maryland.gov or the Board's Executive Director at vanessa.orlando@maryland.gov.

Helpful links

- CDC COVID Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html>
- Maryland Dept. of Health COVID Website: <https://coronavirus.maryland.gov/>
- Governor Hogan's COVID Website: <https://governor.maryland.gov/coronavirus/>
- AVMA COVID Website: <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19>
- American Hospital Association COVID Website: <https://www.aha.org/2020-01-22-updates-and-resources-novel-coronavirus-2019-cov>
- American Association of Equine Practitioners website: <https://aaep.org/resources/covid-19-resources-veterinarians>