



Frequently Asked Questions about Animal Health Issues During COVID-19 Pandemic

April 30, 2020

I need to have my pet spayed, but I can't find a spay/neuter clinic that is open. Why have they been closed?

On March 27, 2020, Governor Murphy issued an executive order (# 109) calling for the suspension of all “elective” surgeries and invasive medical and dental procedures for adults in NJ. Although the order did not specify veterinary procedures, many veterinarians chose to suspend these services to preserve Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), which is currently in great demand and short supply. The NJVMA encourages all NJ veterinarians to suspend elective surgeries, non-emergency procedures, and well visits in order to limit exposure risk and conserve needed personal protective equipment. Veterinarians should use their clinical judgment when deciding which procedures are essential. The NJDOH low-cost spay/neuter program continues to reimburse enrolled facilities for eligible surgeries. NJDOH does not have the authority to mandate that a spay/neuter clinic, or any private animal hospital remain open or to determine what services are provided.

I need to license my dog but can't get a rabies vaccination from my primary veterinarian. Are rabies vaccines essential?

Yes, rabies vaccines (and other vaccines) are essential services to protect both human and animal health. If your veterinarian is unable to accommodate your request, call other veterinarians in your vicinity to ensure your pet remains up to date with his/her rabies vaccinations. You can also contact your municipality and ask about local rabies clinics. Some municipalities are extending their licensing periods due to the pandemic (the license period may be extended through June 30th). Contact your municipality to see if an extension is offered. NJ has not waived rabies vaccination requirements.

The animal hospital I bring my pets to has closed due to COVID-19 concerns. If they are considered essential, don't they have to stay open to take care of our pets?

No. As essential service providers, veterinary practices can stay open, but there is no requirement that veterinary practices must remain open for business. If your animal hospital has closed, they should provide reasonable options for emergency clinics.

I work at an animal hospital, and I need guidance on determining which of the services we offer are considered essential vs elective.

Veterinarians should use their clinical judgment when determining what services are essential. The NJVMA has guidance on veterinary issues, including questions to consider when making decisions on elective vs non-elective care:

https://cdn.ymaws.com/njvma.org/resource/resmgr/hot_topics/COVID_19_3.21.20_FB_Live_QA_.pdf

Veterinarians should follow recommendations for social distancing and infection control: *COVID-19 And NJ Veterinary Practices*: (https://cdn.ymaws.com/njvma.org/resource/resmgr/covid_19_njvma.pdf)

I own a veterinary hospital, and I want to close my business for now, because I am immunocompromised. Do I have to stay open since veterinarians are considered essential?

No. As essential businesses, veterinary hospitals are permitted to remain open for business, while implementing social distancing practices, but they are not mandated to remain open. If you close your hospital, the NJ Veterinary Hospital Manager's Association suggests the following ways to serve your clients:

- Have information about the closest emergency clinic on your voicemail, business entrances, and website.
- Send an email notification of the closure to all clients and include information about the closest emergency clinic.

I am a house call veterinarian. Am I permitted to continue to make house calls during the COVID-19 "shelter-at-home" rules?

Yes, you may continue to make house calls for essential services, if you can do so safely while following infection control and social distancing guidelines. You can get more information from the AVMA house call page: <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19/mobile-house-call-veterinarians-covid19-pandemic>

I am an employee at an animal hospital, and I'm concerned that the owners/managers are not taking proper steps to keep us safe. What resources are available?

The NJVMA has provided tips to implement social distancing and infection control at your practice in the document *COVID-19 And NJ Veterinary Practices*: (https://cdn.ymaws.com/njvma.org/resource/resmgr/covid_19_njvma.pdf). Many practices are using curbside check-in for most services to reduce exposure risk. One exception may be allowing pet owners into the facility for euthanasia. The clinic may also want to consider having dedicated staff interact with the public, to reduce exposure risk to the entire workforce. If your place of employment is not implementing infection control, or social distancing where possible, and you want to make a specific complaint, instructions are below:

- *If you want to complain about an animal hospital/veterinarian, you can go to <https://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov/vet>, and click on the red tab in the upper right hand corner where it says File a Complaint.*
- *To file a complaint about a business violating the executive orders, please go to: <https://covid19.nj.gov/forms/violation>*
- *To file a general complaint against any business, please go to: <https://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov/Pages/Consumer-Complaints.aspx>*

I am an employee at an animal hospital, and I want to know if I am allowed to wear PPE to see my patients. I have heard that some clinics are not letting their staff wear PPE because of the shortage, while others are using too much PPE. Are there any guidelines for us to follow?

AVMA has some recommendations about wearing PPE: <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19/guidelines-ppe-covid-19-pandemic-demand-exceeds>. These recommendations discuss strategies such as postponing elective procedures that require the use of PPE, safely extending the use of disposable PPE, re-using disposable PPE, and increased use of washable PPE. This AVMA page also includes links to the FDA, CDC, and WHO for more information.

Are dog-grooming facilities considered essential?

Yes. Pet groomers have recently been added to the list of businesses that are permitted to remain open.

Are dog shelters allowed to remain open during the COVID-19 shelter-at-home restrictions?

Yes, shelters, pounds, and humane societies are permitted to remain open, although some may have limited hours and services. There are many important functions that need to continue, including reuniting lost pets with their owners, finding adoptive or foster families for abandoned pets, and assisting humane law enforcement with cruelty cases.

Are dog kennels/boarding facilities considered essential?

Pet boarding facilities are included in the list of essential businesses permitted to operate. (<https://faq.business.nj.gov/en/articles/3820777-does-my-business-need-to-close-due-to-the-state-s-covid-19-directives>)

I heard that boarding facilities are considered essential, but the one I usually use is still closed. What if I get sick and need to go to the hospital, or I need to board my pet for some other reason. What should I do?

Pet boarding facilities are listed as essential businesses that are permitted to remain open; however, we do not have the authority to mandate that they stay open. If you are unable to care for your animal and cannot find a boarding facility, it is best to try to find a friend or family member to help. If this is not possible, and you must board your pet in an emergency, you can sometimes locate a veterinary hospital that would be willing to board your pet. Another option is to contact your county's Office of Emergency Management (OEM). They may direct you to a County Animal Response Team (CART), which is a group of volunteers and other entities, such as government agencies and the private sector, with resources and personnel to respond to animal issues in disasters. The CART is organized under each county Office of Emergency Management. For more information on managing animals during emergencies, please see the following website: <https://www.nj.gov/agriculture/animalemergency/cart/>

I work for an animal shelter, and we have been told to cease trapping, and are only to bring in animals that are sick or injured. Is this true?

The NJDOH concurs with the AVMA and the National Animal Control Association statements regarding animal services and temporary sheltering:

<https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19/caring-animals-shelters>
<https://www.nacanet.org/covid-19-pandemic-statement/>

The statements above include recommendations for animal control agencies to take active measures to eliminate non-essential animal shelter intake. Some of these measures include discontinuing low priority/non-emergency activity, such as capturing non-aggressive stray animals and responding to complaints about nuisance animals. High-priority and emergency calls (law enforcement assistance, injured or sick stray animals, dog bites and dangerous dog complaints) should still be handled.

I volunteer for a non-profit dog rescue group. We have foster families in NJ ready to take in dogs that are being shipped into NJ from another state. Are there any special requirements for movement of animals during the COVID-19 pandemic?

All public gathering is prohibited and therefore an adoption event where people gather to obtain pets for adoption or transfer would not be permitted. Animals transported into New Jersey for adoption or transfer would need to be transferred directly to the foster or owner's home or point of destination with all precautions being adhered to, including face masks and social distancing, hand washing, sanitizing, and continual cleaning and disinfection of surfaces. As always, dogs transported into New Jersey are required to be accompanied by a health certificate issued by a licensed veterinarian in the state of origin indicating that the animal is free from communicable disease and hasn't been exposed to such disease. The certificate shall include the name and address of the seller or consigner and owner or consignee, the point of origin and destination, a description of the animal, and the type and date of any vaccinations that have been administered. Rescue groups and animal welfare organizations transporting animals into New Jersey for adoption shall comply with all applicable local and State laws, rules, and ordinances, including the Charities Registration Section of New Jersey Consumer Affairs and USDA APHIS Animal Welfare requirements for transporting animals across state lines in commerce (including adoptions).

My pet has to go to the veterinarian for treatment. How long is COVID-19 viable on my pet's fur, and is it safe for me and my family to handle my pet after treatment if it may have been exposed during the exam?

At this time, it is unknown how long the virus can remain viable on a pet's fur. It is important to practice good hand hygiene, which includes washing your hands for 20 seconds, after touching your pet, and avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.