

COVID-19

As many other businesses have been forced to close in order to minimize human exposure to COVID-19 many veterinary practices have remained open. In those locations where all but “essential businesses” have been forced to close by the government, it is critical that veterinary practices be included in the definition of essential businesses. The practice of veterinary medicine is an essential business because veterinarians provide essential services including guarding the food supply and protecting the public health by diagnosing, controlling and investigating disease. If your practice is located within a jurisdiction that has ordered the closing of veterinary clinics, please contact TVMA for assistance.

The most recent Executive Order from Governor Greg Abbott’s office, in part, ordered licensed healthcare facilities to postpone surgeries and procedures not immediately medically necessary. The order expressed concern regarding the unnecessary depletion of hospital capacity and personal protective equipment (PPE). It further stated that the prohibition does not apply to procedures performed within the proper standards of care that don’t deplete hospital capacity or the PPE supply. The most applicable to veterinary medicine was the necessity not to deplete PPE needed to cope with the COVID-19 disaster. In addition to the Governor’s order there have also been similar local county and municipal directives to eliminate elective procedures at medical and dental facilities.

TVMA advises veterinarians that it is the responsibility of the medical director at each veterinary facility to establish what are/ are not considered elective procedures. It is very important for each leader of the veterinary team to evaluate and determine what is essential for each individual client/patient circumstance with their local facilities.

In determining these decisions, the following should be emphasized:

- 1) **Prioritize the health and safety of the veterinary staff and public so as not to contribute to the spread of COVID-19.** For practices that choose to remain open, it is vital that protocols be established and implemented to protect the staff and public at each veterinary facility based on the infrastructure and procedural risk of each veterinary entity. Social distancing should be strictly maintained and the guidelines as established by the CDC should be utilized to establish specific policy and procedures.
- 2) **Veterinary facilities should offer the PPE equipment that they can do without to local human hospitals.** The human health care teams need access to all available PPE equipment to reduce exposure to COVID-19.
- 3) **It is essential that veterinary services continue to meet animal and public health needs.** The needs for essential veterinary care are not diminished during these times. It is the responsibility of the individual veterinarian/ medical director to establish what is considered an elective procedure that can be postponed and what is essential and must be

done immediately. This consideration includes deciding which vaccines are essential based on each individual patient's history, such as a first rabies vaccine and which vaccines can possibly wait. The answer to this calculation is unique to each veterinary case, facility and region.

- 4) **Veterinarians are on the front lines for zoonotic, epidemiologic and foreign animal diseases.** Our work is essential in protecting the food supply, animal health, client patient well-being and preventing zoonotic disease. The following are nonexclusive examples of disease we must continue to surveil:

- a. Rabies
- b. Leptospirosis
- c. Tuberculosis
- d. Brucellosis
- e. Chaga's
- f. Equine Infectious Anemia
- g. Vesicular stomatitis
- h. African Swine Fever
- i. Any reportable or foreign animal disease