

RETURN TO WORK

10 ways to get your pet ready

Dogs and cats are creatures of routine. If you've been at home with them for weeks or months, they've gotten used to having you around all day. Before you go back to work, it's important to prepare them. A gentle transition will help make this change in routine as stress-free as possible.

COVID-19 has driven many families home to shelter and work. It's also given us the opportunity to enjoy lots of extra time with our pets. Our animals may love this as much as we do – and for pets adopted in the past few months, this may be the only routine they've ever known.

Unlike us, our pets have no way of knowing when our at-home sheltering might be coming to an end. Before pet owners resume normal schedules, we need to help our pets get ready for the transition. Here are 10 tips from the American Veterinary Medical Association to help prepare your pets.

Slowly introduce workday routines—Schedule waking up, feeding, and walking as you would for your expected workday routine. Introduce a consistent departure schedule that builds on that routine.

Take anxiety out of your departure—Practice short departures on a daily basis, and gradually extend the time you are gone. Give a small treat just as you walk out the door to condition your pet to find it rewarding for you to leave. If signs of anxiety occur—such as destructive activity—don't punish your pet. Instead, shorten the time away and slowly build up to longer periods.

Exercise—Before leaving, engage in rigorous play or physical activity. Burning energy can help keep pets calm and relaxed for longer periods while you're gone.

Keep them engaged—Long-lasting treats, food puzzles, and automatic feeders can help keep pets occupied throughout the day.

Create a safe space—If you typically used a crate while you were gone during the day, but have stopped while at home, now is a good time to either explore discontinuing the crate (gradually increasing the length of time you're away) or reintroduce crating while still working from home. Do this by making it rewarding for your dog to go into the crate for short periods.

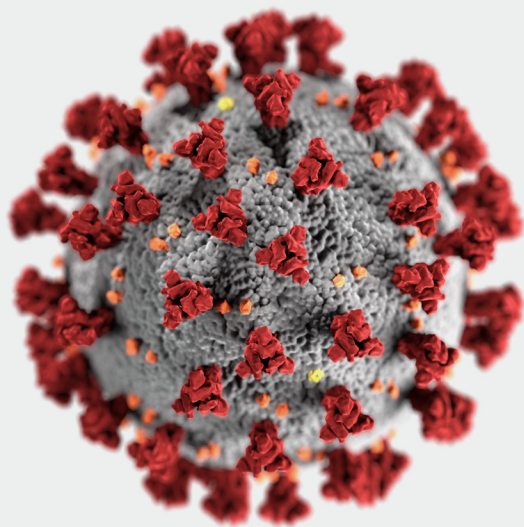
Turn on background noise—Leave on a TV, radio, or sound machine to provide some company while you're away.

Look for signs of stress—Excessive barking or whining, agitation, destructive behavior, and inappropriate urination/defecation can all be signs of stress. If you're concerned, consider filming your pets when you leave so you can observe them and share the video with your veterinarian.

Stay calm—Remain as calm as possible when leaving and returning home. If your pet is overexcited when you return, try not to interact until he/she seems more relaxed.

Schedule visits—Consider having a pet sitter visit and play with your pet if you're unable to return home for an extended period of time.

Talk to your veterinarian—Concerns about behavior, stress, and wellbeing may require a consultation with a veterinary behaviorist or medical intervention.



Protecting against COVID-19

The risk of pets becoming infected with COVID-19 is believed to be low. Still, you should take precautions to keep them safe. If you intend to have a dog walker or pet sitter come to your house while you're away, or if you send your pet to daycare, treat your pet as you would a human family member to protect them from possible infection:

- Limit contact between your pet and people outside the household as much as possible.
- Follow protocols put into place by the daycare, and keep pets at home if you or they are sick.
- Keep cats indoors if possible.
- Don't put face coverings on pets.
- Don't wipe or bathe your pet with chemical disinfectants, alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, or any other products not approved for animal use.