



COVID-19: Meeting the challenge

COVID-19: The world we now live in

We've all had to change how we live our lives since COVID-19 entered our world. From how we work and operate our businesses, to how we stay connected with friends and family, to how we simply move through our days, our lives are different. We've adapted quickly – juggling new procedures; altering services; and monitoring scientific developments, regulatory requirements, and economic impacts – for the sake of our patients, clients, colleagues, and our businesses.

The pandemic is fluid. It varies by state, region, even municipality. Veterinary practices may be allowing clients in the clinic in one area while offering only curbside care elsewhere. Regardless how we're each able to serve patients and clients, though, one fact remains the same – animals and people are counting on us. Patients, clients, team members, colleagues, and loved ones are all looking to us for help in this time of uncertainty and change.

- Patients continue to need the same high-quality care we've always delivered.
- Many clients are spending more time at home, reinforcing the value of their human-animal relationships and driving increased demand for veterinary services.
- Some clients may be struggling financially, while also trying to provide their animals access to the care they need.
- Veterinary team members may also be dealing with new stressors, including financial and health concerns, additional needs of loved ones, and increased rudeness and irritability among those we encounter at work.

Meanwhile, we've transformed the way we see patients and do business, implementing new procedures and protocols – all while keeping up with the changing pandemic landscape.

Whew!

As veterinary medicine continues to evolve during the pandemic, we're all adjusting and growing with it. And we're looking for resources to help each other – because veterinary teams need tools and information to make this evolution easier and smoother. That has been and continues to be one of the many roles of the AVMA. Your AVMA colleagues have created a wealth of resources to address the demands and challenges presented by COVID-19.

What's inside

Ensuring that patients are well cared for, and practices are prepared for whatever lies ahead, demands guidance and advice from trusted experts. That's what you'll find here. This book compiles information that veterinary teams and practices need to continue meeting the challenges of delivering veterinary services during the pandemic.

Whatever the current situation in your area, this guide speaks to what you're going through today and may be experiencing tomorrow as you continue supporting patients, clients, colleagues, and family.

TAKING CARE OF YOU – In dealing with any crisis, it's critical to make sure you take care of yourself first. Your wellbeing directly impacts how you're able to care for patients, support colleagues and loved ones, lead a team, and interact with clients. Get information to help manage your finances, personal health, and safety during the pandemic.

TAKING CARE OF YOUR CLIENTS AND PATIENTS – Clients are looking to you for answers and help in caring for the animals they love and depend on. Supporting them while observing physical distancing and other safety protocols creates new challenges. From patient triage and testing to client communication and telemedicine, find the answers you need – whether your patients are companion animals or livestock.

TAKING CARE OF YOUR TEAM – The veterinary team is the soul of any practice. Ensuring they're safe, healthy, and in the best mindset to care for patients is essential. Find personal protective equipment (PPE) guidance, risk management protocols, and other information to keep the whole team safe, motivated, and able to provide high-quality care.

TAKING CARE OF YOUR BUSINESS – We commit our lives to caring for patients, building client relationships, and growing our practices. Ensuring the business succeeds is essential to the dreams we've all – practice owners, associates, and other team members – worked so hard to achieve. Find resources and information to help keep your business compliant, financially stable, and on pace to achieve long-term growth goals.



So much depends on you

As caregivers, it's easy – and common – to put ourselves last. Our priority often may be the patients and clients who depend on us, the families we take care of, or colleagues who look to us for guidance and count on us for employment. But taking care of ourselves is essential to taking care of others. This means caring for all aspects of our personal wellbeing, from physical health to mental health to finances.

Protect yourself against COVID-19

As essential workers engaged in providing health care during the pandemic, veterinary teams come in regular and close contact with each other and the public. This can put us at risk of exposure.

Know the symptoms

Although infected people can be asymptomatic, these symptoms of COVID-19 are common:

- Flu-like symptoms, including mild to severe respiratory illness, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fever, chills, and/or repeated shaking with chills
- Muscle pain
- Headache
- Sore throat
- Loss of taste or smell



Testing: Get the 411

Different types of tests are available, with wait times for results varying from a few minutes to several days. Check with your local public health department if you believe you may have been exposed to COVID-19. Make sure you know what kind of test is being used so you can make appropriate decisions based on its results. Does the test confirm the presence of pieces of the virus, the presence of whole virus, the presence of live virus, or evidence of an immune response to the virus?

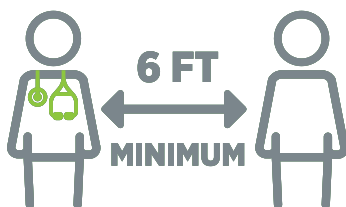
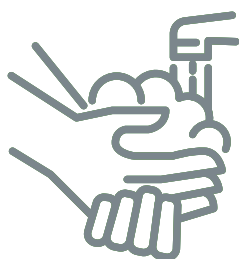
What about vaccines?

Decisions about access and rollout of COVID-19 vaccines are made at the state, territorial, and local levels, with guidance provided nationally by the CDC. The AVMA advocated successfully at the federal level for veterinary personnel to be considered a priority group for vaccination, and CDC guidance suggested that veterinarians and veterinary team members might be included in one of the early stages of distribution. With the final decision in the hands of states, territories, and localities, AVMA has supported state and local veterinary groups in advocating for veterinary teams' access. Individual veterinary professionals can work with state and local associations to support appropriate priority access for veterinary teams. Use AVMA resources to learn more about available vaccines and help build support for vaccination.

GET VACCINE RESOURCES AT [AVMA.ORG/COVIDVACCINE](https://www.avma.org/covidvaccine).

Prevention is critical

Preventing the spread of COVID-19 is key, including through physical distancing, hand washing, and [USE OF PPE](#).



Find the latest on COVID-19 prevention, symptoms and treatments.

Vital resources at your fingertips



Taking care of your mental wellbeing

From how we respond to stressful situations to how we deal with social isolation, there are questions we can ask ourselves and activities we can practice to channel our emotions. For example:

- Share feelings of disappointment with another trusted person.
- Use language that reinforces that your emotions are feelings, not permanent conditions. For example, say, “I feel really disappointed” instead of “I’m disappointed.”
- Ask yourself, “What’s one small step I can take to feel better?”
- See what you can learn from a situation. Identify something positive you can take from it.
- Focus on the good things you have in your life: clean water, healthy food, a roof over your head, loved ones, your own good health, etc.
- Get outside of your own head. For example: help someone in a small way, exercise, meditate, or come up with an alternative activity to a cancelled event.

[Find more tips, meditation exercises, webinars,
and other wellbeing resources.](#)



Financial wellbeing: Student loan relief and more

The government relief measures approved in response to COVID-19 suspended interest accrual and repayment requirements on federal student loans. This relief applies only to federal student loans, not loans owned by institutions or campuses, so borrowers need to be clear on what types of loans they have.

The relief measures also provide incentives for employers to offer student loan support; and offer support for colleges and universities to provide emergency financial aid grants for students.

Lawmakers have revisited these relief provisions periodically, including extending their effective dates. Stay up to date on current provisions on the AVMA website.

[**Vital resources at your fingertips**](#)



A trusted source in our communities

Our passion to care for animals ignited and sustains our careers, protects our patients, and makes us the most valuable ally for our clients in caring for their animals. As scientific understanding of COVID-19 changes, so do safety guidelines, workplace protocols, and best practices. And as case numbers ebb and flow, government mandates shift as well. Veterinarians need to stay current on the science, know state and local requirements, implement safety procedures that allow us to care for patients and protect people, be proactive in communicating with clients, and be prepared to answer questions.

Find the latest advice on caring for patients and interacting with clients.

Vital resources at your fingertips



Testing animals: When is it needed?

Routine testing of animals for SARS-CoV-2 is not recommended. But there are situations where testing might be necessary. Decisions on whether to test should be made collaboratively by the attending veterinarian along with local, state, and/or federal public health and animal health officials. As we learn more we will be better able to identify those situations in which testing may be advisable. Before testing an animal, it's important to have a clear plan on how you'll handle a potential positive test result and what it will mean for the animal and the client.

Know when testing might be appropriate, and download a handy flowchart to help make that decision.

Vital resources at your fingertips



Triage: Urgent vs. non-urgent

Unless an animal is suffering from an obvious medical emergency, taking a few minutes to collect a thorough patient history by phone or with other telehealth tools will help you think through the problem and determine whether an in-person exam or premise visit is needed. This option may be especially important and useful if the client or someone in their household has recently tested positive for COVID-19.

If you answer “yes” to any of these questions, care for the animal is likely urgent:

- Is treatment necessary to preserve the animal’s life?
- Is the animal experiencing serious pain that affects its health, welfare and/or safety?
- Is euthanasia necessary to relieve or prevent pain and suffering?
- Does the animal need treatment to prevent potential transmission of a zoonotic disease to people?
- For livestock, is treatment needed to maintain a safe and secure food supply?

If evaluation or treatment isn’t believed to be urgent, but the situation has the potential to become urgent, consider these questions:

- Is there an unreasonable risk to the veterinary team if the animal must be seen in person?
- What tests or treatment would impact the patient’s outcome?
- Can the owner administer necessary treatments?
- If emergency surgery or treatment is indicated, is the necessary aftercare feasible with current social distancing and PPE constraints?
- Is there an alternative approach that could help in the short term?
- If not treated now, could the animal develop significant health or welfare issues that would become life-threatening, cause irreversible harm, or interrupt or jeopardize safety of the food supply?

When to resume services

Additional questions to consider when clients request services:

- Is the service compliant with state/local orders regarding urgent and non-urgent procedures?
- Can you maintain adequate PPE supplies if you perform the service?
- Do you have adequate staffing?
- Is telemedicine an option?
- Is anyone in the client's household quarantined or showing symptoms of COVID-19? If so, can a non-quarantined and apparently healthy person bring the animal to the clinic?

Case management: Step through the decision

[DOWNLOAD AVMA'S DECISION TREE TO HELP WITH CASE MANAGEMENT AS YOUR PRACTICE MOVES TO RESUME DELIVERY OF SERVICES.](#)

Using telemedicine for patient care

Telemedicine has become an important way to protect and monitor patient health while supporting physical distancing guidelines. The use of telemedicine in veterinary practice is governed by both state and federal laws. It's important to understand the impact of laws at both levels on your legal ability to practice using telemedicine.



Flowchart: Walking through the case

[USE THE AVMA'S PRACTICAL FLOWCHART TO HELP IDENTIFY AND MANAGE URGENT AND NON-URGENT CASES.](#)

Find current AVMA resources to support your use of telemedicine during the pandemic, including an up-to-date list of platform providers and the types of services they offer.

Vital resources at your fingertips



Answers to clients' biggest questions

Good communication is especially critical during uncertain or stressful times. Clients look to us for accurate and trustworthy guidance and reassurance. As the COVID-19 outbreak continues to evolve, so do clients' questions and needs. The AVMA's COVID-19 resource center includes a library of communication tools that empower you with answers and help you instruct clients about new clinic procedures like curbside service.

Cement your position as your clients' trusted go-to information source with downloadable handouts, social media images, and other resources.

Topics include these and more:

- Clinic signage
- Testing animals for SARS-CoV-2 and caring for them if they test positive
- Planning for animal care if owners test positive
- Socializing dogs while social distancing
- Preparing pets for owners' return to work

Bookmark these communications tools so you have the answers your clients need readily available.

Vital resources at your fingertips



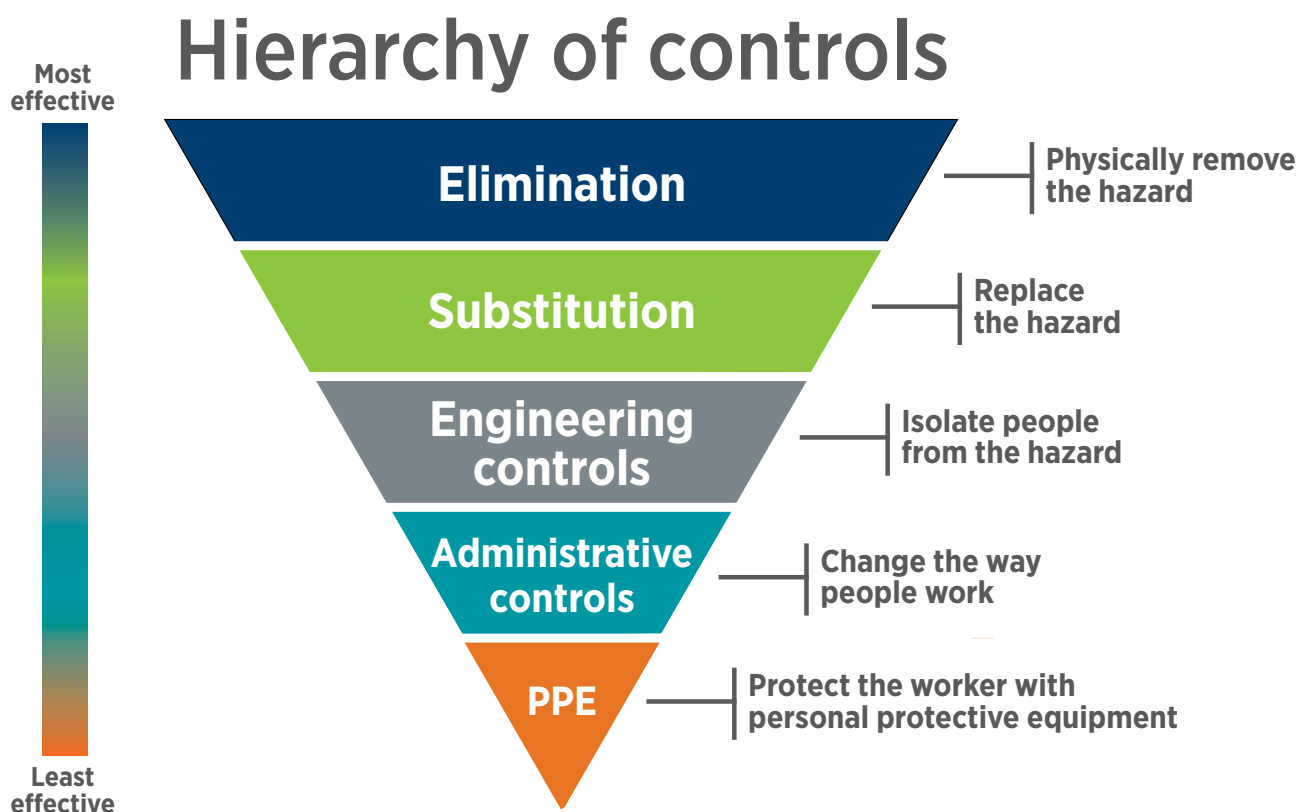
Supporting their safety; providing support and reassurance

Our teams count on us, just as we count on them. Team members greet clients with compassion and grace, calming fears and answering concerns, while listening and learning about each patient. This can take a toll on any day, and especially when tensions run high during uncertain times. With the additional COVID-19 responsibilities and anxiety that team members may be carrying with them into work, knowing we're there for them in every way is vital.

There's much we can do as practice owners and associates to ease the burden on all team members and assure them that their work environment is supportive and as safe as possible.

Staying at the forefront of safety

While PPE is one important component to keep the healthcare team healthy and safe, it's not the only safeguard, nor is it necessarily the most effective. Others include physical distancing, asking and allowing sick team members to stay home, and implementing screening procedures to identify patients that might be coming from households with exposed family members. Guidance for limiting exposure to occupational hazards uses a hierarchy of controls. Multiple strategies may be implemented together or sequentially to minimize exposure.



- Check out the [latest PPE guidelines](#).
- Find and order needed supplies through [AVMA DIRECT CONNECT](#).
- Understand [COVID-19 risk levels](#).
- Know [how to respond](#) when employees have, may have, or might have been exposed to COVID-19.

Vital resources at your fingertips



Reducing the workload

Changing processes – like curbside care, screening questionnaires, and new telemedicine tools – can make it feel like there's even more work to do. Here are some ways to find efficiencies and increase support for the team:

- Develop operational guidelines to streamline new protocols like physical distancing, audio and video check-ins, and remote payment.
- If a daily team huddle isn't part of the regular routine, consider adding one. Use it to listen to everyone on the team. They can help identify opportunities for improvement.
- Make sure you're leveraging the skills and training of your entire team – especially credentialed veterinary technicians.

Download practical tools

Resources in [AVMA'S COVID-19 RESOURCE CENTER](#) can help you create and streamline protocols for triage, case management, social distancing, curbside and limited lobby services, telemedicine, and other new processes.

Communication to boost morale

Being completely transparent with team members about the steps we're taking and what the process looks like goes a long way toward easing fears, getting their buy-in, and making them feel safe and valued. So does encouraging them to discuss challenges openly and offer ideas for improvement. Candid dialogue is a foundation for trust and success – along with understanding and supportive policies.



Business makes it all possible

Our patients, clients, teams, and families look to us for help in different ways – and continuing to support all of them requires that our businesses succeed. This demands financial and business savvy, along with awareness and compliance with laws and regulations. COVID-19 has interrupted business planning, strained supply chains, and changed the legal landscape in some areas. But there are strategies we can implement to continue growing our practices even during the pandemic.

Maintain cash flow

Cash flow is what enables our businesses to operate in the black month to month, and it's a critical focus especially during uncertain times. Many practices have implemented innovative strategies – like curbside care, online ordering, and alternative payment plans – to keep the doors open and continue operations during the pandemic. On the expense side, options to reduce cash outflow include, among others:

- Inventory control
- Renegotiating vendor contracts
- Delaying equipment purchases

Build for the future

Now is the time to save as much as possible and protect, or even build, a rainy-day fund. For most practices, it's not a time to make significant changes, such as major equipment purchases, significant employment decisions, or facility remodels. But while the playing field might have changed, our businesses can still win the long game:

- Step 1: Evaluate where you are today
- Step 2: Imagine where you want to be
- Step 3: Plan how to get there

Dig deeper

- [IDENTIFY STRATEGIES FOR MAINTAINING CASH FLOW.](#)
- [DOWNLOAD A PRACTICAL BUSINESS PLANNING CHECKLIST.](#)
- [GET THE LATEST BUSINESS RESOURCES FOR WEATHERING THE PANDEMIC.](#)

COVID-19 stimulus and relief

The federal government has taken unprecedented steps to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak with financial relief for businesses as well as individuals. These measures have been revisited and revised throughout the COVID-19 emergency. In general, the business measures include:

- Small business loans
- New tax provisions
- Unemployment insurance measures

Get the latest information on all federal relief measures that affect your business.

Vital resources at your fingertips



Regulatory changes and state measures that affect you

Many of the laws and mandates that affect our businesses are implemented at the state or local level. During COVID-19, temporary changes have been made to some requirements, including those affecting the use of telemedicine, the veterinarian-client-patient relationship, PPE, CE, and other areas. Staying current is essential for business success.

Check with your state veterinary association and state veterinary board to know current requirements in your area.

We're all in this together

COVID-19 has affected veterinary practices across the country. Just one month into the pandemic, 98% of U.S. practices already were limiting client contact. Practice owners also had implemented a wide range of measures to protect team members and clients while continuing to provide the critical healthcare services that our patients need. Later AVMA analyses found that more than half of all veterinary practices nationwide had taken out stimulus loans. The effects of the pandemic on veterinary medicine have been both far-reaching and profound.

AVMA has kept in touch with practices throughout this unprecedented time to explore the extent of COVID-19's impact, identify strategies that are working and can be replicated by others, and track disease and economic conditions to help plan and prepare for what's ahead. AVMA's survey data is available in an interactive survey dashboard where you can view the results yourself.

[READ THE KEY FINDINGS OF AVMA'S RESEARCH AND CHECK OUT THE INTERACTIVE DASHBOARD.](#)



Courtesy of the National Pork Board, Des Moines, Iowa USA.

Stay connected; know the latest

There's no single resource that can provide veterinarians and veterinary practices with all the answers needed during this unprecedented time. Your AVMA community is a powerful resource to tap when you have questions and to stay updated on the latest information related to COVID-19. AVMA provides regular updates through social media, the AVMA@Work blog, and email newsletters available to AVMA members. By remaining flexible, adaptable, connected, and unified we can successfully navigate these uncertain times together.

AVMA@Work blog - avma.org/Blog

Facebook - facebook.com/AVMAvets

Twitter - twitter.com/AVMAvets

LinkedIn - linkedin.com/company/AVMA/

YouTube - youtube.com/user/AmerVetMedAssn

Newsletters - avma.org/Newsletters

