

Tips in ensuring that you, your staff and your clients minimise the risk of contracting / spreading COVID-19 in your veterinary Practice.

Based on WHO document "Getting your workplace ready for Covid-19", published 3 March 2020, as well as inputs from Councillors

Understanding how Covid-19 Spreads:

When somebody who has Covid-19 sneezes, coughs or talks, droplets of saliva / nasal fluid are expelled to settle on surrounding surfaces – hands, countertops, tables, keyboards, floors, etc. Transmission could be by touching such surfaces and then making contact with your mouth, nose or eyes before washing your hands. Most people will be symptomless or show very mild symptoms. Immunocompromised people, the elderly and people with pre-existing disease (especially respiratory disease) are at higher risk of complications associated with Covid-19.

Simple ways to minimise spread of Covid-19 in your practice:

- 1) Ensure workplaces / surfaces are clean and hygienic
- 2) Surfaces (desks, tables, door handles, toilet flushers, etc) and objects (telephones, keyboards, medical diagnostic equipment, etc) need to be wiped with disinfectant regularly
- 3) Promote and empower employees and clients to regularly and thoroughly wash their hands:
 - a. Provide easily accessible, adequate washing areas / hand sanitizers
 - b. Display posters promoting handwashing – see www.WHO.int for downloadable information
 - c. Educate and emphasise to staff repeatedly the importance of handwashing
- 4) Promote good respiratory hygiene in your clinic:
 - a. Display posters related to this
 - b. Educate and emphasise to staff the method and importance of correctly sneezing, coughing, etc
 - c. Ensure that face masks and paper tissues are available at the clinic for people who may develop a runny nose or cough, along with closed bins for hygienic disposal of these items
- 5) Advise employees with relevant education and precautions to be taken when travelling – be it in planes, trains, busses or taxis.
- 6) Ensure that anyone showing one or more symptoms of Covid-19 should stay at home:
 - a. Fever
 - b. Cough
 - c. Runny nose
 - d. Muscle ache

This is especially important if people have taken anti-inflammatories which may mask the symptoms.

- 7) Special precautions should be taken if meetings need to be arranged – please see WHO document on their website for details of this
- 8) Prepare an action plan before the time as to how to deal with a person who develops symptoms whilst on your premises. Develop this for:
 - a. Clients
 - b. Staff
 - c. Visitors
 - d. Representatives of companies
 - e. Attendees of essential meetings
- 9) Should a staff member test positive, or should you or a staff member have been in contact with somebody who has tested positive:
 - a. Have yourself tested and place yourself in self-isolation / quarantine for 14 days. Remember that much viral shedding and transmission can take place prior to development of symptoms
 - b. Close the practice and perform a thorough and detailed disinfection of the premises.
 - c. All staff should have access to the contact details of the neighbouring practice pre-identified to assist in an emergency shutdown, and make arrangements with such a practice to assist if needed.
 - d. Develop a protocol on how your practice can be entered in the event of the premises being under quarantine and how to easily access an owner's contact details (e.g. owner details can be printed) which can be shared with the emergency contract practice.
 - e. Persons entering a quarantined practice should wear adequate PPE (e.g. disposable gown, gloves, goggles/glasses and a N95/FFP2 mask) to allow for the discharge or transfer of patients to another practice (Please note the OIE notice on transfer of companion animals being a safe practise with no pet to owner transmission yet documented).

Dealing with Clients / Patients / Staff at your practice:

As the incidence of Covid-19 increases in your area it may be necessary to implement more drastic and dramatic actions. These actions could be the following:

- 1) Preparing an information sheet / WhatsApp message to be sent to all clients making appointments or arriving at your clinic detailing the special requirements you are instituting as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic, e.g. hands will no longer be shaken as a greeting, sanitising of hands before entering and on leaving premises, etc.
- 2) Postponing all non-essential presentation of patients by clients – e.g. grooming, annual health checks, etc
- 3) Providing access to your clinic so that clients do not need to touch the doors, e.g. swing doors, a member of staff opening and closing doors for clients, etc.
- 4) Minimising the amount spent in your clinic by clients – e.g. waiting in the car till an appointment is open, then going straight to the consultation room. Remove all

seats and sitting areas in the waiting room. No clients should spend more than the bare minimum of time on the premises / in the building.

- 5) Prevent clients from entering the clinic – have the patients fetched from the car and perform the consultation by cell phone.
- 6) If possible, have video telecons with clients whilst performing the examination of their pets.
- 7) Reduce the number of consultations per session to allow for thorough and even more detailed and accurate disinfection of work surfaces, etc.
- 8) Limit use of equipment / computers to specific members of staff where practical.
- 9) Limit owner visits and provide as much information telephonically rather than face to face meeting, e.g. results of blood / laboratory results, etc.
- 10) The focus should be on mitigation of risk, and part of this could mean to divide the veterinary team into smaller units that alternate duty on a weekly basis. That way, if someone falls ill in the one team, the other team can take over etc. This also reduces the chance of community spread within the practice.
- 11) In smaller towns, this might take the form of practices alternating service – one practice on duty the one week, the other the other week
- 12) Answering of calls should include taking people's health information.
- 13) Consult rooms should only be veterinarian and one handler (owner only and not kids, partners etc.). If not possible, owner can deliver patient with history to handlers and pick up when done. Continuing treatment plan to be communicated telephonically.
- 14) If at all possible, clients in high risk groups as per the WHO should be discouraged from visiting the practice unless absolutely unavoidable
- 15) All clients arriving at practices to disinfect hands upon entering. Could also think about making wearing of masks compulsory.

In a nutshell, remember the following principles:

- 1) Repeated handwashing and basic personal hygiene**
- 2) Practising of good respiratory hygiene methods**
- 3) Ensuring social distancing – 2m at least, and especially where people sneeze / cough**
- 4) Repeated, repeated, repeated surface disinfection**