



Veterinary Ireland Media Release 23rd March, 2020

Veterinary Ireland Protocols to protect continuity of service, staff and clients in light of COVID-19 Emergency

***No evidence animals can contract COVID-19 – but if you are in isolation do not let other people touch your pet ***

Veterinary Ireland, the profession's national representative organisation, has confirmed that veterinary practices, state and local authority veterinary services nationwide will endeavour to remain open and operating throughout the COVID-19 national emergency period.

Dr. Conor Geraghty, Veterinary Surgeon and President of Veterinary Ireland said: "Our primary role is to protect animal health and welfare and also, by ensuring the health of the animals we keep and safety of the food we eat, to protect our nation's health whilst maintaining the continuation and integrity of the food chain during this emergency." Dr. Geraghty explains that, for this reason, veterinarians are classified as 'Essential Workers' by the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the World Veterinary Association (WVA).

Dr. Geraghty gave assurances that measures have been put in place to keep Irish veterinary services available to as near normal as possible whilst protecting the health of clients and staff.

"Many practices have split their teams into two or three core groups, with no physical contact between them, to ensure that if a member of one group contracts the virus and is isolating, then others can step in to ensure the practice remains operating."

"Additionally, on a local level, veterinary practices are working with each other to ensure that if one has to close or reduce capacity for a period then others nearby can and will step in. This may mean prioritising emergencies.

PERSONAL DISTANCING & RULES FOR ATTENDING VETERINARY PREMISES

Veterinary Practices have introduced new strict rules to comply with governmental advice regarding personal distancing.

Dr. Alan Rossiter, Veterinary Surgeon and Past-president of Veterinary Ireland said "Our government and the health authorities are showing excellent and decisive leadership and the advice we are given must be adhered to by all of society in all places at all times." Dr. Rossiter outlined the Veterinary Ireland rules regarding attendance at companion animal practices which he described as simple but effective:



- All visits are by appointment only
- Only one person should attend with their animal
- Wait outside or in the car with your pet until called to avoid close contact in the waiting room
- No handshakes – do not touch anyone
- Card payments where possible
- If possible owners are not to hold the animals when the vet examines them
- Keep 2 metres distance
- Wash your hands correctly

Dr. Rossiter continued “Before you go to your local veterinary practice, even if for medications or pet food, you should call first so that appropriate personal distancing can be observed in the reception and waiting areas. These rules may be onerous but they are proportionate and necessary and they are to protect you, your families and our staff so that we can remain open. Don’t forget a sick vet means no vet.”

Veterinary Ireland has produced guidelines for vets and for the public. These are available on practice websites and their social media.

IF YOU ARE IN ISOLATION - DO NOT LET OTHER PEOPLE TOUCH YOUR PET

Dr. Rossiter said that there was no evidence this virus can be contracted by animals. “Testing has been done and there is no evidence to suggest that pet dogs or cats can be infected with SARS-CoV-2,” said Dr. Rossiter.

“However it is in theory possible that virus from an infected person could land on a pet’s coat and remain viable for a short period of time. Therefore if in isolation for whatever reason, or if you have symptoms, do not let other people touch your pets and keep dogs and cats indoors or, if taking your dog outside for toileting, have your dog on a lead.”

VETERINARY EXPERIENCE

Dr. Geraghty said that vets are used to dealing with infectious diseases. “We know the precautions to take. Indeed many vets will have first-hand experience dealing with such an outbreak during the Foot and Mouth Disease epidemic. Whilst on a different scale the first principles are the same and this experience, as well as the deep medical knowledge and extensive practical training the veterinary profession has, allowed us to adapt virtually overnight to this new situation.”

“Veterinary Surgeons are here for our clients and patients 24 hours a day 365 days a year and will continue to be throughout this crisis. With the understanding and co-operation of the public we will get through this emergency together.”

In conclusion Dr Geraghty said “Never in our lifetimes have we faced such a challenge. However never in the history of humankind have we had the tools, resources and knowledge to find a cure and develop a vaccine. All of us together face many difficult months and many difficult decisions but we will get through this, we will persevere and, by working together with kindness and solidarity, we will protect the most precious in our society until we have a vaccine available and our lives get back to normal. That day will come.”



“Our heartfelt admiration lies with our medical and nursing colleagues. Equal respect and gratitude goes to others working on the front line, those keeping our food supply intact, those keeping our homes warm, those keeping us informed, those keeping us safe and secure. All of these are our true national heroes and whatever we, as medical professionals, can do to help in this time we will do.”

ENDS

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Issued on behalf of Veterinary Ireland by:

Antonina Ni Dhuinn, Progress Communications
Tel: 01 – 2766117 / 087- 265 3683 nina@progresspr.ie