

From: HQ

Date: Monday 16 March 2020 at 14:47

Subject: VetALERT 11/20 - COVID-19 Update - Message from President Conor Geraghty - 16th March 2020

Dear colleague,

We find ourselves in unprecedented times. The coming weeks and months are going to be very challenging for our nation as a whole. Vets, as medical professionals, must show leadership and best practice in dealing with this unfolding crisis. We have a duty of care to our families, staff, clients and animals under our care. The welfare of animals must be attended to, food must be produced and inspection duties must be carried out. While veterinary practices need to remain in operation to service societal needs, we must protect our clients and staff from infection with COVID-19. We have been in contact with our colleagues in DAFM and they will keep us informed of any changes in contingency planning as they occur.

Vets understand disease transmission and prevention, as well as epidemiology and therapeutics, and we all have to step up to the mark and speak with confidence and authority to help society get through this. We need to inspire confidence in medicine and science and we need to back up our medical colleagues who are doing a wonderful job. We need to inspire confidence in the leadership shown by government and the advice given must be adhered to. Veterinary Ireland will send on new information and advice as and when it is required.

I advise that each practice appoint a COVID-19 lead person. It is vital that we as a profession provide clear leadership during this time and this is best achieved by the public seeing that someone is in charge and that that person knows what they are doing.

Veterinary practices should take all necessary steps to minimise contact with people. Many practices are taking the lead in this already. Examples include

- Following HSE guidelines on handwashing
- Drawing up SOPs for staff in the event they feel unwell
- Only allowing one client into the shop or waiting room at a time
- Encouraging clients to phone ahead so orders are compiled in advance
- Using nurses to restrain animals rather than the owner
- Minimising contact between ambulatory vets and practice-based staff
- Refraining from going into farmers houses for tea etc.
- Trying to maintain a 2 meter gap between clients and vets/nurses/admin staff
- Wearing of gloves, sanitising of surfaces

Some practices have kindly offered templates of communications they have sent to clients (see attached) and these are available to members to amend as they see fit.

Further advice and information will be sent in the coming days and weeks, in particular some practical advice on how to deal with the financial downturn we will all face together - and that we will all get through together.

I wish you and your families my best in these times and above all else, stay safe.

Yours sincerely,



Conor Geraghty MVB Cert DHH
President, Veterinary Ireland



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Template text of email/Facebook Post, etc. to large animal clients - COVID-19

Dear Client,

(Name of Practice) recognise the seriousness of COVID-19 and also that farmers and the Agri food sector require a veterinary service to maintain food supplies to the nation. From Monday 16th March we will be taking some steps to protect the health of clients, staff and their families.

I will be taking the lead in (Name of Practice) regarding COVID-19. This plan outlined may be subject to changes depending on restrictions put in place by the government in the coming days and weeks.

- Please call ahead if you need to collect products from the shop. This will ensure that items are assembled and ready to collect on arrival.
- Clients should enter the shop one at a time to minimise the risk of either picking up or spreading the virus. If you see another farmer in the office please wait outside until they leave.
- If you are unwell and need products or a call to an animal, we will make the necessary arrangements to meet your needs in confidence. Call (Practice phone number)
- Clients attending clinics should make an appointment so we can stagger arrivals thus minimising the risk. If you arrive at clinic please wait in your car until it is your turn.
- We have, as of last Friday, separated the vets from the admin staff to minimise contact and risk of virus spread. This will continue as long as the high-level threat remains. The office staff will remain 2 meters back from clients at the counter and will be wearing gloves to reduce risk to both themselves, to you and your families.
- We all have loved ones in the vulnerable category so every effort must be made to reduce the potential spread of COVID-19 so that the health service is not overwhelmed with cases over the coming weeks. We are available to provide all your veterinary needs during this busy springtime period and having studied the options we are confident we can do so safely and with minimal risk to everyone.
- Most important of all, stay safe, minimise contact with others and wash your hands regularly.

All the best,

(Lead person)

Template text of email/Facebook Post, etc. to small animal clients

Dear Client,

My name is Dr (insert name) MVB and I will be taking the lead in (insert clinic name) regarding COVID-19.

I will be giving regular updates on the evolving situation as we have more information and as government advice changes over the coming period. I will keep the advice short and succinct, based on the best available science and with the aim of protecting you, your families and our staff whilst at the same time remaining available to look after your pets as best we can.

As health professionals we are used to dealing with infectious diseases and we have the knowledge, experience and materials needed to ensure the highest standards of clinical hygiene in our veterinary premises throughout the day.

In addition many vets aged 45 and upwards have first-hand experience of dealing with an infectious disease epidemic during the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in 2001/2 and, whilst this is on a different scale in terms of scope and effect on human health, the first principles in what is needed to be done to reduce spread are exactly the same.

In short - veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses have the knowledge and tools to do what needs to be done and the general public can depend on us to do the right thing to protect you and your families.

If you have questions I will answer them as best and as honestly as I can but please be patient, I may not be able to answer all the questions immediately and for some questions I just may not know the answer immediately.

Having examined the various risks it is clear that it is important to reduce the numbers of people mixing in the waiting room. As such we have instituted the following rules with immediate effect:

1. All visits should be by appointment only. Please do not come down without calling first. We will see emergencies as fast as we possibly can, as ever, but please call us first. We will be leaving a gap between appointments so as to reduce the in-out flow. This may mean we will have somewhat less capacity - please understand if you cannot be seen at the time you prefer.
2. When you are coming please make sure it is one person only with your pet. If it is essential that more than one person attend please call your vets to discuss in advance.
3. Please wait in your car and call the reception to let us know you have arrived. When we are ready to see you they will call you in. Please go straight into the consultation room and take a seat. The vet will take matters from there.
4. If you have children - please do not bring them. We love having families in with their little pets but until this crisis has passed it is best children do not attend. If you must bring your children with you - which is of course understandable if they cannot be left at home alone - please leave them in the car if they are old enough. If they are too young to stay in the car then the nurses can collect your pet and drop them back to you, and the vets can discuss everything with you at the car or by phone.
5. For repeat medications and for pet food please call your vet with at least 24 hours notice so that we can have them ready for you. Have a look in the window and if there are a few people in the waiting room please wait outside until people leave. The nurses can if you like drop your medications or food to the car if you like, just call when you arrive.

6. Where at all possible please pay by card, contactless is available in general. The key pad will be disinfected between people using it. We can also accept bank transfer payment if asked. If ordering food/medications by phone you can pay over the phone at that time.

7. If you are unable to come in - be it that you are unwell or you wish to self-isolate - we will do everything we can to help. Call us and we will look after you and your pet as best we can. We will, where staffing allows, happily drop repeat prescriptions to the home if you are in this situation. At worst they can be posted.

8. If you are facing financial difficulties due to reduced income during this period and your pet is unwell - please call us, we will do all we can to look after you and your pets during this time.

9. Please please please be patient with our brilliant and caring staff if there are delays, we are all doing our best but all of these extra precautions are going to slow up things a little.

To conclude - we will get through this. The steps our government is taking and the advice being given is excellent and is based on the best scientific information available, so please do what we are advised by those who know.

We will look after each other, we will be kind to each other, we will do all that we have to do to protect the vulnerable. If we all stick together and do what we are advised life will get back to normal in the medium term. Never in any of our lifetimes have we faced anything like this but never in the history of humankind have we been better able to rapidly find a cure and develop a vaccine for a pandemic like this.

It will get better, we will mind each other and we will persevere.

Yours sincerely,

****ENDS****