

From: HQ <HQ@vetireland.ie>

Date: Tuesday 5 May 2020 at 11:31

Subject: VetALERT 21/20 - VICAS - Living with COVID-19 - Companion Animal Veterinary Practice

Dear colleagues,

As Ireland enters a new phase of living with SARS-CoV-2 for the foreseeable future, and recognising that the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission at companion animal veterinary premises has been minimised by the profession's early adoption of stringent biosecurity and personal distancing protocols, an assessment has been performed into how and when to safely resume provision of comprehensive veterinary care for companion animals. For background please find attached 'Living with Covid-19: Companion Animal Veterinary Practice 2020-2021'.

Having reviewed the current situation and sought feedback from numerous companion animal veterinary practitioners around the State, the opinion is that veterinary practices should consider, in the near future, resuming provision of preventative health care procedures for companion animals but in a staged and very tightly controlled manner so as to 'flatten the curve' of a potential peak in demand for veterinary services.

The advice to consider resuming services is not saying that one must recommence full - 'normal' - provision of preventative healthcare immediately. It is rather that practices should assess if postponing all the preventative healthcare work and other necessary but currently non-urgent procedures for a further prolonged period - resulting in an ever increasing backlog of work and number of animals that may present as emergencies due to what were preventable conditions - may actually be higher risk than recommencing these over the next several weeks in a slow, staged and very controlled manner. It is not appropriate I believe to issue prescriptive missives as has been done in other jurisdictions - this is not a black and white decision making process. Each practice, lead by the practice principal(s) but planning together as a team of veterinary professionals, will have to assess their own particular circumstances to make their own assessment of the varying risks posed by the various scenarios and plan accordingly.

Speaking for myself we will in my practice next week commence inviting in a small handful of 'overdue' animals on a day-by-day basis as the practice's diary allows so that this work can be done and overdue procedures 'caught up on' over the coming months. To do this we produced a spreadsheet of patients overdue from January onwards and each day our nurses will telephone a handful to arrange appointments for them over the coming days. As the situation stabilises over the coming months we will revert to our normal process of sending reminders by text, email, etc, but will do it in smaller batches than normal.

We have emailed/texted this plan to our clients and it is on our website and social media. We are absolutely micromanaging resumption of our vaccines, neuterings, dentals etc in a way that these patients can receive the care they need but in a way that we feel is as safe as humanly possible for our staff and that does not overwhelm us with too much work presenting in too short a time.

I have discussed this with my staff, with everyone having input into the decisions we make, and they are all in agreement with what is now not 'my plan' but 'our plan'. However I am the practice principal and I am responsible for my staff's health and welfare. If I ever felt that the risk were too high for my staff, or that the volume of work is overwhelming them, I will change things immediately, irrespective of any financial cost that entails. This collegial approach is, I believe, one that we must all consider taking in our own practices.

Colleagues, if we wish to continue providing a service for our clients and the animals under our care - as I believe we must - there is no 'zero-risk' scenario available to us until we all have been vaccinated for Covid-19. All we can do is manage all the risks we face 'living with Covid-19' to the best of our ability, with the health and welfare of our families and staff front and central to all decisions we make. We are immensely qualified health professionals with huge knowledge and experience of infectious diseases. We have more ability than any other profession to effectively assess and manage the ever changing risks we face and to make the best decisions that can be made. Now is our time to shine, to lead by example, to make each and everyone of us proud to stand tall and say "I am a vet".

Please read the attached document for background and explanation.

Yours sincerely,



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