



Frequently Asked Questions about Animal Health Issues During COVID-19 Pandemic

August 26, 2020

I need to have my pet spayed, but I can't find a spay/neuter clinic that is open. Why have they been closed?

In March 2020, Governor Murphy issued executive order # 109 calling for the suspension of all “elective” surgeries and invasive medical and dental procedures for adults in NJ. Although the orders were not applicable to veterinary procedures, many veterinarians chose to suspend these services in an effort to preserve Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). In May 2020, Governor Murphy issued executive order #145, allowing “elective” surgeries and invasive medical and dental procedures to resume. In June 2020, the NJ Division of Consumer Affairs issued Administrative Order No. 2020-10, which states that veterinarians are authorized to provide the full scope of veterinary services, including all urgent, non-urgent and routine veterinary services, including spays and neuters, and establishes protocols to reduce the spread of COVID-19 . <https://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov/COVID19/Documents/DCA-AO-2020-10.pdf>

The NJDOH low-cost spay/neuter program continues to reimburse enrolled facilities for eligible surgeries. NJDOH does not have the authority to mandate that a spay/neuter clinic, or any private animal hospital remain open or to determine what services are provided.

I need to license my dog, but I can't get a rabies vaccination from my primary veterinarian. Are rabies vaccines essential?

Yes, rabies vaccines (and other vaccines) are essential services to protect both human and animal health. If your veterinarian is unable to accommodate your request, call other veterinarians in your vicinity to ensure your pet remains up to date with his/her rabies vaccinations. You can also contact your municipality and ask about local rabies clinics. Some municipalities are extending their licensing periods due to the pandemic (municipalities are normally permitted to extend their licensing period through June 30th, but in response to the COVID pandemic, a 90-day extension period beyond that date has been granted). <https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/pdf/EO-159-Appendix.pdf> Contact your municipality to see if an extension is offered. NJ will not be waiving rabies vaccination requirements.

The animal hospital I bring my pets to has closed due to COVID-19 concerns. If they are considered essential, don't they have to stay open to take care of our pets?

No. As essential service providers, veterinary practices are allowed to stay open, but there is no requirement that veterinary practices must remain open for business. If your animal hospital has closed, they should provide reasonable options for emergency clinics.

I work at an animal hospital, and I need guidance on determining which of the services we offer are considered essential vs elective.

Veterinarians are currently permitted to provide the full scope of veterinary services, including all urgent, non-urgent and routine veterinary services. Veterinarians should use their judgment when determining what services they are capable of providing during this public health crisis. The NJVMA has guidance on veterinary issues, including questions to consider when making decisions on elective vs non-elective care, and recommendations for social distancing and infection control: *COVID-19 And NJ Veterinary Practices*: (<https://njvma.org/page/COVID-19andNJVeterinaryPractices>)

I own a veterinary hospital, and I want to close my business for now, because I am immunocompromised. Do I have to stay open since veterinarians are considered essential?

No. As essential businesses, veterinary hospitals are permitted to remain open for business, while implementing social distancing practices, but they are not mandated to remain open. If you close your hospital, the NJ Veterinary Hospital Manager's Association suggests the following ways to serve your clients:

- Have information about the closest emergency clinic on your voicemail, business entrances, and website.
- Send an email notification of the closure to all clients and include information about the closest emergency clinic.

I am a house-call veterinarian. Am I permitted to continue to make house calls during the COVID-19 "shelter-at-home" rules?

Yes, you may continue to make house calls for essential services, if you can do so safely while following infection control and social distancing guidelines. You can get more information from the AVMA house call page: <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19/mobile-house-call-veterinarians-covid19-pandemic>

I am an employee at an animal hospital, and I'm concerned that the owners/managers are not taking proper steps to keep us safe. What resources are available?

The NJVMA has provided tips to implement social distancing and infection control at your practice in the document *COVID-19 And NJ Veterinary Practices*: (https://cdn.ymaws.com/njvma.org/resource/resmgr/covid_19_njvma.pdf). Many practices are using curbside check-in for most services to reduce exposure risk. One exception may be allowing pet owners into the facility for euthanasia. The clinic may also want to consider having dedicated staff interact with the public, to reduce exposure risk to the entire workforce. If your place of employment is not

implementing infection control, or social distancing where possible, and you want to make a specific complaint:

- *If you want to complain about an animal hospital/veterinarian, you can go to <https://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov/vet>, and click on the red tab in the upper right hand corner where it says File a Complaint.*
- *To file a complaint about a business violating the executive orders, please go to: <https://covid19.nj.gov/forms/violation>*
- *To file a general complaint against any business, please go to: <https://www.njconsumeraffairs.gov/Pages/Consumer-Complaints.aspx>*

I am an employee at an animal hospital and I want to know if I am allowed to wear PPE to see my patients. I have heard that some clinics are not letting their staff wear PPE because of the shortage, while others are using too much PPE. Are there any guidelines for us to follow?

In May 2020, Governor Murphy rescinded the suspension of elective surgeries and invasive procedures, in recognition of the decreasing burden of COVID-19 on our healthcare system. The AVMA has some recommendations about the use of PPE, as veterinary facilities resume normal service: <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19/guidelines-ppe-covid-19-pandemic-demand-exceeds>. Employers have the obligation to provide their employees with PPE needed to keep them safe while performing their jobs. This AVMA page also includes links to the CDC for more information.

Are Dog-grooming facilities considered essential?

Yes. Pet groomers have recently been added to the list of businesses that are permitted to remain open.

Are dog shelters allowed to remain open during the COVID-19 shelter-at-home restrictions?

Yes, shelters, pounds, and humane societies are permitted to remain open, although some may have limited hours and services. There are many important functions that need to continue, including reuniting lost pets with their owners, finding adoptive or foster families for abandoned pets, and assisting humane law enforcement with cruelty cases.

Are dog kennels/boarding facilities considered essential?

Pet boarding facilities are included in the list of essential businesses permitted to operate. (<https://faq.business.nj.gov/en/articles/3820777-does-my-business-need-to-close-due-to-the-state-s-covid-19-directives>)

I heard that boarding facilities are considered essential, but the one I usually use is still closed. What if I get sick and need to go to the hospital, or I need to board my pet for some other reason. What should I do?

Pet boarding facilities are listed as essential businesses that are permitted to remain open; however, the NJDOH does not have the authority to mandate that they stay open. If you are unable to care for your animal and cannot find a boarding facility, it is best to try to find a friend or family member to help out. If this is not possible, and you must board your pet in an emergency, you can sometimes locate a veterinary hospital that would be willing to board your pet. Another option is to contact your county's Office of Emergency Management (OEM). They may direct you to a County Animal Response Team (CART), which is a group of volunteers and other entities, such as government agencies and the private sector, with resources and personnel to respond to animal issues in disasters. The CART is organized under each county Office of Emergency Management. For more information on managing animals during emergencies, please see the following website:

<https://www.nj.gov/agriculture/animalemergency/cart/>

I called animal control to have them remove a stray cat from my property, but they said they were told to cease trapping healthy cats during the COVID-19 pandemic. Is this true?

Some municipal animal control officers and licensed animal control facilities were ordered to cease trapping of non-essential animals by their local OEM or other local officials. This is not a NJ Government mandate, but the NJDOH supports the decisions made by each municipality as to whether they are capable of safely trapping and impounding healthy free-roaming cats that are not causing an immediate danger to the public during the pandemic. Certified animal control officers are mandated by Statute to take into custody and impound stray dogs as well as any animal off the property of the owner that is sick or injured, suspected to be rabid, or creating a threat to public health or safety. These animals should be taken into custody and impounded at the licensed contracting impoundment facility.

The National Animal Control Association has a website with guidance for animal control officers, but the guidance documents are only suggestions, and each municipality must take into account their own situation and circumstances.

<https://www.nacanet.org/naca-statements-on-covid-19/>

I volunteer for a non-profit dog rescue group. We have foster families in NJ ready to take in dogs that are being shipped into NJ from another state. Are there any special requirements for movement of animals during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Adoption events where people gather to obtain pets for adoption or transfer need to adhere to capacity limitations of indoor and outdoor gatherings, as set by the executive orders issued by the Governor. A list of the executive orders may be found here: <https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/>. Also, all precautions must be adhered to, including face masks and social distancing, hand washing, sanitizing, and continual cleaning and disinfection of surfaces. As always, dogs transported into New Jersey are required to be accompanied by a health certificate issued by a licensed veterinarian in the state of origin indicating that the animal is free from communicable disease and hasn't been exposed to such

disease. The certificate shall include the name and address of the seller or consigner and owner or consignee, the point of origin and destination, a description of the animal, and the type and date of any vaccinations that have been administered. Rescue groups and animal welfare organizations transporting animals into New Jersey for adoption shall comply with all applicable local and State laws, rules, and ordinances, including the Charities Registration Section of New Jersey Consumer Affairs and USDA APHIS Animal Welfare requirements for transporting animals across state lines in commerce (including adoptions).

My pet has to go to the veterinarian for treatment. How long is COVID-19 viable on my pet's fur, and is it safe for me and my family to handle my pet after treatment if it may have been exposed during the exam?

At this time, it is unknown how long the virus can remain viable on a pet's fur. Although we know certain bacteria and fungi can be carried on fur and hair, there is no evidence that viruses, including the virus that causes COVID-19, can spread to people from the skin, fur, or hair of pets. Do NOT wipe or bathe your pet with chemical disinfectants, alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, or any other products not approved for animal use. It is important to practice good hand hygiene, which includes washing your hands for 20 seconds, after touching your pet, and avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands. For more information on COVID-19 and pets, please see the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) pages:

For People with Pets: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/pets.html>

Frequently Asked Questions- scroll down to the Pets and Animals section:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#COVID-19-and-Animals>

What precautions should I take to protect my pets?

Until we learn more about how this virus affects animals, treat pets as you would other human family members to protect them from a possible infection.

Because there is a small risk that people with COVID-19 could spread the virus to animals, the CDC recommends that pet owners limit their pets' interaction with people outside their household.

Recommendations include:

- Keep cats indoors when possible, and do not let them roam freely outside.
- Walk dogs on a leash at least 6 feet away from others.
- Avoid public places where a large number of people gather.
- Do not put a mask on pets. Masks could harm your pet.

Talk to your veterinarian if your pet gets sick, or if you have any concerns about your pet's health.

Can I take my dog to a dog park?

Because there is a small risk that people with COVID-19 could spread it to animals, CDC recommends that you do not let pets interact with people outside of your household, especially in places with community spread of the virus. Therefore, you should consider avoiding dog parks or other places where large numbers of people and dogs gather.

You should also adhere to all executive orders by the governor, including limits to numbers of people gathering indoors or outdoors. These are changing frequently, so it's best to check this website for the most up-to-date information:

<https://nj.gov/infobank/eo/056murphy/>

For more information on dog parks, and other pet-related questions, please visit the CDC's FAQ page, Pets and Animals section: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#Pets-and-Animals>.

Can I catch COVID-19 from my pets?

At this time there is no evidence that animals play a significant role in spreading the virus that causes COVID-19, and the risk of animals spreading the disease to people is considered to be low.

I was diagnosed with COVID-19. Will my pets catch it from me?

It appears that in some situations the virus can spread from people to animals. Until more is known about this new coronavirus, you should restrict contact with pets and other animals while you are sick with COVID-19, just like you would with people. If possible, have another member of your household care for your animals while you are sick. If you must care for your pets while you are sick, wash your hands before and after you interact with pets, and wear a mask.

What should I do if I think my pet has COVID-19?

There is a small number of animals around the world reported to be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19. Talk to your veterinarian about any health concerns you have about your pets. If your pet gets sick after having contact with a person with COVID-19, let the veterinarian know that the pet was around someone with COVID-19. Some veterinarians may offer telemedicine consultations or other plans for seeing sick pets.

I am a veterinarian, and I need information on testing my patients for COVID-19.

To discuss COVID-19 testing, veterinarians should contact NJDOH during daytime hours at (609) 826-4872 or (609) 826-5964 or email zoonoticrn@doh.nj.gov. Please see our website for more information, including criteria for testing, and clinical signs that may be seen with pets infected with the virus:

https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/documents/topics/NCOV/COVID_Domestic_Companion_Animals.pdf