Coronavirus: An information update from the College of Veterinarians of Ontario
Update: March 20, 2020

- Essential services and veterinary medicine

The College of Veterinarians of Ontario has received an increasing number of questions from veterinarians seeking direction as to what a shutdown in non-essential services means for veterinary medicine in Ontario.

As the College said in its March 13th update, veterinary medicine is currently not deemed to be an essential service in Ontario under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. Veterinary medicine is similar to the majority of human health professions in this regard.

Nonetheless, the provincial authorities understand the critical role that veterinarians serve in protecting human and animal health, and the OVMA and others continue to emphasize this on your behalf.

As calls for action by our human health colleagues increase, the province has issued a directive to health care providers to cease or reduce non-essential or elective services. The College believes a consistent approach is appropriate for veterinary medicine. This does not mean you need to close your practice. However, this does mean you are asked to alter your services to support social distancing. The College has been consistent in its message that veterinarians are to use their judgement in reducing services that are not deemed necessary to support human and animal health at this time of public health emergency.

What that looks like is dependent on your individual practice. As in human health care, it makes sense for veterinarians to maintain services that avoid negative patient outcomes. It is equally logical to avert situations that would have a direct negative impact on the safety or welfare of an animal or group of animals. Preventative health measures that have long term disease implications, (such as flea and tick control, heartworm prevention) can also potentially be maintained in many cases through mechanisms such as telemedicine. Veterinary services dedicated to food safety and disease response in livestock are critical.

None of us know what the next few days or weeks may bring. Again, we stress that veterinarians follow all public health recommendations, be innovative in your care delivery (think telemedicine), and make smart choices in reducing services not essential to the scope of the work you do for the time being. When you do provide necessary treatment, be attentive to your infection control and biosecurity protocols to safeguard employees and clients.

The College continues to monitor this challenging and unprecedented situation. Please watch for our updates. Please connect by e-mail at practiceadvice@cvo.org if you have questions.

We trust your judgement. Stay well.
Additional Resources:

OVMA - COVID-19 checklist for clinics
Worms and Germs Blog
Government of Canada COVID-19 Guidance Documents

Helpful Reference Materials:

Updates from the College on COVID-19
www.cvo.org/coronavirus

Ministry of Health

Infection prevention and control best practices for small animal veterinary clinics (general)
https://oahn.ca/resources/ipc-best-practices/

OVMA (COVID-19 FAQ)
https://www.ovma.org/veterinarians/coronavirus-faq/

Worms & Germs Blog (COVID-19 posts)
https://www.wormsandgermsblog.com/tags/covid-19/

Public Health Agency of Canada

World Health Organization
https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019

OIE World Organization for Animal Health

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