Coronavirus: An information update from the College of Veterinarians of Ontario
Update: March 16, 2020

- Veterinary medicine as an essential service
- Reducing service/closure for safety

The College of Veterinarians of Ontario recognizes veterinarians are concerned about the potential implications of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on practice. These are unusual and challenging times for all.

Information on public health directives are changing rapidly. The College is actively monitoring provincial government decision-making and endeavouring to provide key details to assist you in making safe choices regarding your practice.

Veterinary medicine as an essential service:
Veterinary medicine, like many professions, is currently not deemed to be an essential service in Ontario under the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. The only area where a veterinary role is named as essential is for those working in provincial government as veterinary scientists for the purpose of food safety and disease response. Food animal veterinarians also have a significant role in advice related to food safety.

At this time, there has been no government directive to reduce or limit services. The College supports every veterinarian in using their professional judgment when deciding to alter services to support public and animal health during this pandemic situation.

Reducing Services/Closure:
The College is aware there are a variety of factors related to coronavirus and COVID-19 that will affect veterinary facilities and their ability to provide veterinary services that are necessary to protect animal and public health. Veterinarians are encouraged to employ their best judgment, and to determine the scope and breadth of veterinary services that they can reasonably and safely provide during this time. Reducing or altering services may be a reasonable step for some facilities. Steps may include:

- using telemedicine to consult with existing clients
- completing patient triage external to the building
- decreasing elective procedures, and others

The Ontario Veterinary Medical Association has developed a checklist that sets out actions a practice should take to safeguard employees and clients and plan for the future.
A veterinarian may determine the need to temporarily close a facility due to staffing shortages or other uncontrollable circumstances. If this need arises, a veterinarian is expected to consider questions such as:

- How will clients be notified of the temporary closure?
- What tools will be used to notify clients? (example: website, or signage)
- How will clients access their animal(s)’ medical record information?
- What nearby facilities are an option to refer clients for veterinary care?
- How will the facility be secured, including drugs and hazardous materials?
- How will the facility ensure that these steps are clearly documented?

The College supports veterinarians as they navigate choices in these uncharted waters. Stay well!

**Helpful Reference Materials:**

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

- **Professional Practice Standard - Informed Client Consent**

- **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**