



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

- **Telemedicine**

The College of Veterinarians of Ontario understands that these are unusual times and is supportive of veterinarians finding creative and suitable options for keeping animals and the public safe. One of these options may be for veterinarians to implement or expand their use of telemedicine.

Telemedicine is defined as the provision of specific veterinary medical advice and veterinary treatment of an animal(s) based on the remote diagnosis of disease and injury by means of telecommunications technology (ex. phone, video call, etc.) where no physical examination of the animal(s) by the veterinarian takes place. The College has permitted the practice of veterinary medicine by telemedicine since 2016. The College has developed both a Professional Practice Standard and accompanying guide that outline and explain the expectations around this form of practice, which are readily available for review on the College's website.

To aid in the consideration of the adoption or expansion of this form of practice during this period of uncertainty, the College has highlighted the following frequently asked questions related to the practice of telemedicine.

What does practising via telemedicine mean?

Practising via telemedicine refers to delivering veterinary medicine using telecommunication technology. It is a method or mode of delivering veterinary medicine using information and communication technologies, such as video chat, when the veterinarian and animal being treated are in different physical locations. Practising via telemedicine does not alter a veterinarian's existing legal and professional obligations.

Can a veterinarian prescribe via telemedicine?

A veterinarian is required to prescribe for an animal(s) with whom they have established a veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) and obtained recent and sufficient knowledge of through either a physical examination or premise visit. A veterinarian is expected to use their professional judgement when determining whether they have an appropriate amount of recent and sufficient knowledge in order to provide a prescription. If a veterinarian believes that they have this information, then a veterinarian is permitted within a VCPR to provide a prescription via telemedicine.

Does a veterinarian have to work from an accredited facility to practice via telemedicine?

Yes. A veterinarian licensed in Ontario must work from an accredited facility to practice veterinary medicine. This is no different when practicing via telemedicine. The veterinarian can be the owner or an associate at an accredited hospital, mobile, or office that offers telemedicine services. Veterinarians do not have to be physically present at the accredited facility to provide telemedicine service.

What are the medical record requirements when practising via telemedicine?

Veterinarians should adhere to the medical records requirements required by Regulation 1093 and College policy when providing veterinary medicine via telemedicine. A veterinarian should make a note that a service was provided via telemedicine if he or she also offers services in-person.

As always, the College's practice advisory team is available to answer any questions or concerns individuals may have related to this topic. This service may be reached by email at practiceadvice@cvo.org.

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

Ministry of Health
<https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus>

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 <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/frequently-asked-questions.html>

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

OIE World Organization for Animal Health
<https://www.oie.int/en/scientific-expertise/specific-information-and-recommendations/questions-and-answers-on-2019-novel-coronavirus/>

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