

Guidance in light of the new national lockdown

Thank you for your patience while we formulated the best guidance under the current circumstances. This guidance applies to members in all countries of the UK (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland), and all fields of clinical veterinary practice (small animal, large animal and equine.)

The British Veterinary Union in United Kingdom (BVU) places your safety as its utmost priority. Whilst veterinary workplaces can continue to open during this lockdown, we all have a duty to reduce public health risk at a time of critical NHS strain, and potential shortage of human health resources.

Therefore, it is the advice of the BVU that **no routine veterinary work should be carried out unless it is done in a COVID secure manner.**

What does this mean in practical terms?

COVID secure work means:

- The animal can be handled by a single person, and staff members can maintain adequate social distancing (>2m)
- Work can be carried out via telemedicine if appropriate, and if appropriate this should be encouraged to minimise contact and travel
- The workplace and its equipment is kept clean and disinfected between use
- Interactions with the client are handled either remotely (eg, by phone), or whilst maintaining adequate social distancing (>2m) **and** mask use
- Work which does not need to be carried out on site, such as admin tasks and telemedicine, should be carried out **from home**

The BVU understands that **urgent or emergency veterinary work cannot always be carried out in a COVID secure manner.** Should this be the case, the following steps should be undertaken to reduce risk:

- If the animal cannot be handled by a single person, staff members should spend as little time as possible within 2m of one another.
- All staff within 2m of one another should wear level 2 PPE: type IV water resistant mask, eye protection, water resistant apron, and **single use** gloves. Type IV masks should be changed every 4-6 hours, or if they are soiled, and not cleaned for re-use. Water resistant aprons should be changed if they are soiled or torn, and not cleaned for re-use.
- Staff working within 2m of one another should be classed as a **workplace bubble**, and there should be **no crossover of workplace bubbles**. Workplace bubbles should be kept to the minimal number of people required to complete the task. We do not envisage this should be more than 3 people unless under exceptional circumstances.
- Work of this nature should be carried out in a well ventilated area
- The workplace and its equipment is kept clean and disinfected between use
- Interactions with the client are handled either remotely (eg, by phone), or whilst maintaining adequate social distancing (>2m) **and** mask use

Where **any of the above steps** cannot be accommodated, human health should be prioritised, and you should consider: adjustments so the above steps are followed **OR** re-directing the patient to a facility that can safely see the patient **OR** delaying the patient's visit until such a time that it is safe to do so.

In addition:

- ⇒ Veterinary workplaces should make every effort to protect vulnerable staff members, or those with vulnerable people within their household or bubble. In many cases, this may include furlough. These workers should have an up to date personal risk assessment, and be included in decision making about their safety.
- ⇒ Veterinary workplaces should make every effort to support workers who have school-age children who cannot access key worker schooling facilities. This could include furlough, home working opportunities or rota adjustments, and the worker should always be included in decision making about their working conditions.
- ⇒ The BVU is urgently seeking clarification on the critical worker status of veterinary sector employees.

Please remember it is every workers responsibility to consider health and safety, and act in a manner that reduces risk for all.

Veterinary Surgeons have a duty to ensure that the welfare impact of each case is considered when deciding what the appropriate route of care is for that patient. The welfare impact must be considered alongside risk to themselves, their colleagues and the general public.

If you do not feel safe at work, or you cannot follow the guidance here, **stop the task immediately, perform a risk assessment or request one from your line manager**, and only resume work when it is safe to do so.

We applaud those practices which are putting in place stringent measures to protect their staff and the general public, and feel it is deeply unjust that they should be placed under any excess financial strain or unfair competition from employers who flaunt government guidelines, fail to provide safe working environments, or abuse the revised RCVS guidelines. We recognise this may have significant financial impact for veterinary practices, but **worker safety and public health must come before profit during a global pandemic.**

If you feel your employer is not providing a safe working environment, and are a member of the BVU, please contact us at bvu@unitetheunion.org with your membership number, place of work, best contact number and details of the situation.

As we did with success in the last two lockdowns, we will happily contact practices on your behalf (with you remaining anonymous) outlining the health and safety concerns in your practice, and communicate directly with your employer to ensure their resolution.

If you are not a member, we invite you to [join us](#); together we will work to ensure safer and fairer conditions for you – in crisis, and always.