

BVU Statement on the Updated Guidance issued by RCVS and BVA on April 8th 2020



The British Veterinary Union in Unite (BVU) has carefully considered the guidance issued yesterday by both the RCVS and the BVA.

The UK is in crisis, with deaths from COVID-19 currently being reported at levels comparable to the peaks in Spain and Italy, and our healthcare system is under great strain. Government and international advice is very clear – there should be no unnecessary travel.

Our profession has a public responsibility, as One Health Professionals, to proceed in line with this advice.

The BVU does not support any change in guidance away from seeing urgent and emergency cases at this time, while the government lockdown remains unchanged. As such we urge the RCVS to clarify that routine appointments continue to be inappropriate at this time.

The RCVS guidance is clear that veterinary professionals should use their own clinical judgement. Whilst the BVA has published more clinically specific guidance, in your capacity as a veterinary professional you are only beholden to the RCVS.

It is each Veterinary professional's duty to ensure that the welfare impact of each case is considered, alongside risk to themselves, their colleagues, and the general public; and to extensively limit close contact with members of the public.

Many of our members are concerned that misinterpretation or abuse of the updated advice, by the general public and employers, could significantly increase their risk of exposure to Covid-19.

The country is facing a dire shortage of effective PPE, which should be prioritised for the NHS. The problem of ineffective or inadequate PPE is further compounded by the fact Veterinary practices are often small and poorly ventilated with cramped rest facilities, making social distancing at work very difficult. An increased workload will make it much harder for staff to practice social distancing in the workplace.

All practices must ensure that any and all cases are handled in such a way to minimise the risk to staff and clients. Employers **MUST** continue to follow government guidance on health and safety at work during the COVID-19 pandemic (including remote working where possible, social distancing at work, and ensuring strict biosecurity) in order to be compliant with workplace Health and Safety legislation (HASAWA 1974).

We applaud those practices that 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 or abuse the revised RCVS/BVA guidelines, worker safety and public health for profit during a global pandemic.

We understand the financial toll of this crisis on Veterinary business, but profit must never be allowed to come before staff safety or public health.

As a Veterinary professional, you are in position of responsibility at work, and as such should act according to your own clinical judgement. You may refuse to see cases, or undertake work, which in your judgement places you or your colleagues at unnecessary risk, but you should raise the specific concern with your employer and the BVU as soon as possible. You can also report concerns directly to the Health and Safety Executive, and we recommend you have a look at their [website](#).

If you are a member of the BVU, and feel that your workplace is endangering your safety by not fully abiding COVID-19 health and safety guidance, please contact us at bvu@unitetheunion.org with the details of your situation. Please include your membership number, place of employment, and the name and contact details of your line manager.

We will be contacting employers anonymously on behalf of any and all members who reach out to us, outlining any concerns with their handling of staff and public safety, and the consequences of a failure to correct these issues.

If you are not a member, and have any concerns about your safety at work, we invite you to join us; together we will work to ensure safer conditions and a fairer workplace for you – in crisis, and always.

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