

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Guidance for Veterinary Practice Personnel

This document is meant as a companion to AVMA guidance (<https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19>).

KEY POINTS:

- Your veterinary practice is responsible for developing and executing a plan to monitor personnel for fever or COVID-19 symptoms (cough, shortness of breath).
- Given community spread, all personnel should self-monitor for symptoms each day prior to starting work and should not report to work if they exhibit any symptoms.
- Staff with underlying health conditions or who are otherwise immunocompromised may be at increased risk of adverse outcomes from COVID-19 infection. Consider this when meeting staffing needs.
- Social (physical) distancing between personnel and clients should be implemented in all areas of the practice when feasible.

BACKGROUND:

Veterinary medicine is considered an essential service during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since practice personnel may be exposed to each other and clients, self-monitoring is crucial to decrease the risk of infection for everyone. It is also crucial that veterinary practices develop a social distancing protocol for staff and have limited client interaction. These new guidelines have evolved as a result of greater experience, the availability of published data on COVID-19, growing evidence of community transmission of COVID-19, and established infection control principles.

SOCIAL DISTANCING IN VETERINARY PRACTICES:

Social or physical distancing is one of the best and simplest ways to help slow the spread of COVID-19 infection. Social distancing is generally defined as keeping space, at least 6 feet, between yourself and others outside of your home and within your practice. In practice, this can be achieved by picking up animals from clients at their car or outside the practice and conducting consultations and payment over the phone. Another option is utilizing telemedicine appointments when appropriate.

Social distancing is not always possible when performing procedures, which is why it is critical to monitor your health and the health of veterinary practice personnel. If possible, veterinary practices should consider creating staff teams that work opposite shifts, do not have contact with each other, and sanitize the practice at the end of each shift. That way, if someone on one team becomes sick and the other members of that team need to be quarantined, the other unexposed team may continue to work and meet staffing needs.

MONITORING OF ALL VETERINARY PRACTICE PERSONNEL:

Given community spread of COVID-19, personnel may be exposed to COVID-19 in the community or at home, develop the disease and increase the risk of transmission to other personnel or clients. Therefore, the LA County Department of Public Health (LAC DPH) recommends that veterinary practice personnel self-monitor two times a day, including once prior to starting work. The goal of this screening is early identification of personnel with fever or symptoms of respiratory illness to decrease the risk of exposure of other practice staff and clients.



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RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. All veterinary practice personnel should self-monitor twice daily, once prior to coming to work and the second, ideally timed approximately 12 hours later for possible symptoms of COVID-19 (i.e., temperature >100.0 and/or cough or shortness of breath).
2. If practice personnel have symptoms (i.e., fever and/or cough or shortness of breath), they should contact their place of work **immediately** and stay home from work.
3. Veterinary practices should screen all personnel prior to the start of working their shifts. Practices should develop and implement screening systems that cause the least amount of delays and disruption as possible (i.e., self-report, single-use disposable thermometers or thermal scanners, etc.).
4. Veterinary practice personnel with fever should be sent home immediately and **NOT** allowed to work.
5. Veterinary practice personnel who are [close contacts](#) to a presumed or confirmed COVID-19 case should follow [home quarantine orders](#) for 14 days unless exceptions are needed for staffing the workplace, see RETURN TO WORK CONSIDERATIONS FOR ASYMPTOMATIC PRACTICE PERSONNEL WHO HAVE HAD AN EXPOSURE TO A CONFIRMED OR PRESUMED COVID-19 CASE.
6. Practices should review their policies on work absenteeism and ensure that the policy is flexible, non-punitive and consistent with the goal of excluding sick personnel and allowing personnel to care for sick family members.
7. Staff with [underlying health conditions](#) or who are otherwise immunocompromised may be at high risk of serious illness and possibly death from COVID-19. Facilities may want to consider limiting exposure of high-risk staff to clients and other staff.
8. Be diligent about cleaning/disinfecting in the practice. Pay particular attention to high touch surfaces (doorknobs, toilet handles, phones, light switches, equipment and areas where employees share computers/tables/desks).
9. Cloth face coverings should be worn by personnel and clients both inside and outside the veterinary practice whenever they cannot stay six feet from each other. More information on cloth face coverings is available at <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/docs/protection/GuidanceClothFaceCoverings.pdf>

VETERINARY PRACTICE PERSONNEL WITH CONFIRMED OR SUSPECTED COVID-19 RETURN-TO-WORK PROTOCOL:

Refer to [CDC Criteria for Return to Work for Healthcare Personnel with Confirmed or Suspected COVID-19 \(Interim Guidance\)](#) and [CDPH COVID-19 Guidance for Veterinary Professionals and Premises for more information.](#)

RETURN TO WORK CONSIDERATIONS FOR ASYMPTOMATIC PRACTICE PERSONNEL WHO HAVE HAD AN EXPOSURE TO A CONFIRMED OR PRESUMED COVID-19 CASE:

Practices could consider allowing asymptomatic personnel who are close contacts to a COVID-19 patient to continue to work after options to improve staffing have been exhausted. These personnel must continue to report temperature and absence of symptoms each day prior to starting work. Practices should have exposed personnel to wear a facemask while at work for the 14 days after the exposure event. Personnel must remain



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under home quarantine when they are not at working as essential personnel.

If personnel develop even mild symptoms consistent with COVID-19, they must notify their supervisor and leave the workplace immediately. They must also follow home isolation orders and home isolation guidance available [here](#).

If you have questions, email LAC DPH Veterinary Public Health at vet@ph.lacounty.gov or call at 213-288-7060.

