



DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, TRADE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

Veterinary Examining Board

September 9, 2020

Recommended Best Practices for Wisconsin Veterinary Clinics

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, we are all anxious to return to a normal routine. While we are not there yet, we can continue to work cooperatively to support progress and preserve stability for our employees and our patients.

We are seeing an increased number of staff at veterinarian clinics testing positive for COVID-19 or being exposed to a person with the virus. This can have a disastrous impact on a clinic and a community if one ill staff member results in asking all employees to self-quarantine due to exposure.

The Wisconsin Department of Health Service (DHS) and the Veterinary Examining Board recognize that veterinary services are essential to animal and public health and, in some communities, the closure of a clinic or the quarantine of a solo practitioner can leave a community without veterinary services. However, being “essential” also means that we must do our part and take appropriate precautions to prevent exposure to COVID-19.

Local public health departments complete contact tracing on positive COVID-19 cases to determine close contacts who are at risk of infection. As such, we want to remind all veterinarians to take necessary precautions to protect themselves, their staff, and their clients from exposure. This is important inside and outside of the clinic. Veterinarians and their staff that are taking the appropriate precautions, as

described below, are less likely to be found to be “close contacts” and, therefore, may be less likely to face a 14-day quarantine for all staff at the clinic.

Require employees to wear face coverings when interacting with co-workers and clients.

- Workers who have frequent, close contact with customers or staff may need to wear some combination of a facemask, a face shield and/or goggles. Personal protective equipment (PPE) for workers will vary by work task and the types of exposures workers have on the job.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings, especially in areas of community transmission. A cloth face covering does not protect the wearer from viruses, but it may prevent the spread of viruses from the person wearing the covering to those around them. Face coverings are not PPE and are not appropriate where masks or respirators are required.
- Supply face masks or cloth face coverings for all employees. Employees should wear a facemask or cloth face covering when near other employees and customers, and at all times when indoors.



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Maintain as much social distance as possible between employees, and limit clinic access or capacity for client/customers to maintain social distance.

- Maintain social distancing of at least 6 feet between people in the clinic at all times. The capacity of your clinics should be reduced to ensure that adequate distancing is possible for staff and customers.
- Clinics should take precautions to minimize staff contact with all pet owners. Examples of actions to take to minimize contact with pet owners or other people include:
 - Using professional judgement when determining whether [a case is urgent or non-urgent](#) and when procedures should be postponed.
 - Scheduling drop-off appointments or receiving companion animals from their owners' vehicles (also called "curbside" service).
 - Communicating via telephone or video-chat to maintain social distancing.
 - Using direct-to-exam-room admissions or enforcing social distancing in the lobby and waiting areas.
 - Having staff members, rather than clients, hold animals to minimize direct contact.
 - Using online payment and billing to reduce handling credit cards or other potential fomites.
- Place staff on separate shifts, where possible, creating cohorts that do not work together. This preserves staff groups should one group become exposed.

Proactively communicate with staff regarding the need for them to stay home if sick.

- Ask about the health status of your employees to screen for COVID-19 status.
- Require employees to stay home when sick.

Inquire as to the health status of your customers/clients to screen for a COVID-19 positive status, symptoms or exposures to someone who has tested positive.

- For those who have been exposed, are positive, or experience symptoms, consider rescheduling non-urgent matters, or request that another person bring the animal for examination. For guidance on handling the pets of anyone who is sick or has been exposed to the virus, refer to the American Veterinary Medical Association's guidance for [social distancing in veterinary practice](#). Additional information on treating exposed animals is also available from the [CDC](#).
- Post signage on the door letting customers know about changes to your policies. Instruct them to stay away if they are experiencing symptoms of illness.

Clean and sanitize workplaces and waiting areas throughout the workday. WEDC General Guidelines:

- *After opening:* Disinfect common and high-traffic areas including door handles, desks, phones, light switches and faucets. Consider assigning people to clean and disinfect surfaces throughout the workplace, and provide training for disinfecting contaminated areas. Always wear gloves appropriate for the chemicals being used when cleaning and disinfecting. Never mix household bleach with ammonia or any other cleaner.



Employers must ensure workers are trained on the hazards of the cleaning chemicals used in the workplace in accordance with Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards.

- *Before opening:* Sanitize your business to limit the spread of virus. Minimize exposure by involving as few employees as possible in this process. Disinfect all areas. Give special attention to tools, workstations, restrooms, food service areas, phones, computers and other electronics. Replace HVAC air filters following manufacturer's guidance. Workplaces should consult with HVAC professionals when considering ventilation changes to reduce the risk of COVID-19.

Following these guidelines does not guarantee that a clinic or practice will remain open during the COVID-19 pandemic, but clinics that follow these guidelines are more likely to remain operating. More importantly, clinics that follow

these guidelines are preventing further propagation of COVID-19.

DHS has acknowledged that local public health officials may identify critical services and front-line workers in their jurisdiction that would be unable to operate if recommended quarantine guidance were applied. DHS supports local public health officials offering alternative arrangements to these employers on a case-by-case basis if the recommended home-quarantine would negatively impact public health and safety. In these limited scenarios, DHS recommends that return-to-work for potentially exposed employees be conditional upon the employer's ability to follow CDC's guidance, [Implementing Safety Practices for Critical Infrastructure Workers Who May Have Had Exposure to a Person with Suspected or Confirmed COVID-19](#). Employers should work with local public health officials to create a plan for regularly monitoring employees for symptoms, disinfecting work areas, masking employees, and modifying operations to reduce contact between employees.



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