

Guidance for UK veterinary practices on working safely as Covid-19 lockdown restrictions are lifted

This BVA guidance is intended to support veterinary practices to work safely as they make the transition from providing services that are “essential for animal health and welfare only” to a more normal range of veterinary services, in line with the easing of lockdown restrictions.

It recognises that that each individual veterinary practice will need to make changes to their service provision at their own pace and that practices will need to work in line with national and devolved legislation and local guidance. It will remain in place for as long as necessary and will be updated as the governments update their guidance on safe working.

This BVA guidance is supplementary to the [RCVS guidance](#), which is regularly reviewed and updated in line with legislative changes.

Government restrictions across the UK

During February and March 2021, governments across the UK announced roadmaps for easing lockdown restrictions. There is no specific guidance for veterinary practices and practices have been able to stay open throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Veterinary professionals should refer to government websites for the latest information on local rules and restrictions for the general public and businesses:

[England](#) ~ [Scotland](#) ~ [Wales](#) ~ [Northern Ireland](#)

Working on the borders

Due to the legal differences and variations in approach between the four nations of the UK and between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, vets should be mindful of their own local situation and refer to the relevant government website for more information.

Veterinary professionals working with clients on both sides of a border will need to take this into consideration and work under the laws and guidance relevant to where the work is taking place.

General principles for veterinary practices

- 1. Safe working:** All services should be risk assessed and provided in a manner that supports safe working and social/physical distancing, but recognises that 2m distancing will not always be possible between team members. Including:
 - a. continuing to work from home if possible and appropriate
 - b. minimising in-person contact with clients
 - c. maintaining a safe physical distance from others where possible
 - d. working in fixed pairs or small teams, where possible, to reduce contact with others
 - e. considering wider health and safety needs, such as safe animal handling
 - f. practising good hand hygiene and biosecurity at all times
 - g. consider using lateral flow testing to improve identification of asymptomatic people
- 2. Prioritising cases:** Each veterinary practice will need to make this transition at their own pace, based on their available resources and the extent to which they can adapt their workplace or working practices. Practices will need to assess and prioritise veterinary

caseloads, including cases that have not been seen during the lockdowns, and manage how to re-establish and deliver services. Prioritising must be based on clinical and professional judgement for animal health and welfare and public health, and practices may want to take a phased approach to undertaking this work.

3. **New ways of working:** Individual consults and procedures may still take longer than they used to in order to practise social/physical distancing. Practices should consider how to charge appropriately for their professional time, including for remote consultations, and how to communicate this to clients.
4. **Supporting colleagues and encouraging rest/breaks:** Practice teams have been working incredibly hard and in different ways during lockdown. Many individuals have worked extra hours; others have juggled work with homeschooling and caring responsibilities; and many colleagues have not taken annual leave or breaks. Employers should encourage and facilitate team members to take leave or breaks, including themselves. Employers should also be aware of the importance of supporting all employees' mental health and wellbeing at times of change and uncertainty. Advice and guidance are available via [Vetlife](#), [Vet Support NI](#), and [Vet Support Scotland](#). The government has also provided [Guidance for the public on the mental health and wellbeing aspects of coronavirus](#).

Supporting one another

We continue to urge neighbouring practices to work together to ensure full geographical cover for emergency veterinary services, for example, where a practice is struggling to cover the rota due to staff self-isolating.

We are asking practices, at these difficult times, to put aside commercial interests to support one another, including encouraging the retention of clients by their original practices.

Face coverings and PPE

Face coverings in veterinary practice:

Members of the public are required to wear face coverings inside veterinary practices, unless they are exempt for age, health, or equality reasons. We advise practices to ask clients to let them know at the time of booking an appointment if they are exempt (without asking for the reason) so that appropriate steps can be taken to see the client safely.

For staff the rules vary across the UK: in Scotland and Wales it is mandatory for staff to wear face coverings; in England vet practices are not explicitly listed but employers should assess the use; and in Northern Ireland it's not mandatory where social distancing can be maintained, but it is advised. For more information, see the [BVA advice for veterinary professionals](#).

PPE: RCVS Knowledge has produced excellent [guidance on the use of PPE in veterinary practice during the Covid-19 pandemic](#) (updated 17 December 2020). You can also watch the RCVS Knowledge webinars on infection control and biosecurity in practice: [Part 1 \(recorded 27 March\)](#) and [Part 2 \(recorded 30 April\)](#).

BVA Guidelines for safe working in veterinary workplaces

Practices have adapted brilliantly to new ways of Covid-safe working. As lockdown restrictions are lifted, we encourage all practices to continually risk assess any changes they are making in consultation with the whole team.

1. Undertake regular risk assessments for your workplace:

- Involve colleagues to help the whole team understand the risks of any changes, and mitigating actions.

2. Minimise client contact as much as possible:

- Continue to use phone or video calls to triage and obtain histories.
- Think about which areas of the practice it is safe to allow clients in and provide clear signage.
- Manage client expectations and be clear about what measures they can expect.

3. Staff who can work from home should continue to do so, for now:

- Practices should continue to support home working but begin to plan how colleagues will start to come back to the workplace in consultation with the team.
- We anticipate there will be further government guidance on returning to the workplace safely.

4. Minimise staff contact:

- Practices should consider continuing to work in fixed pairs or small teams, to keep everyone safe and be mindful that test, trace and isolate schemes are still in place.
- Physical distancing measures should be maintained as far as possible.

5. Follow all hygiene and biosecurity measures:

- Use clear signage to remind colleagues and clients to comply with all measures.

6. Think about physical space and layout:

- Use floor markings and signage to help maintain physical distancing and reduce congestion.
- Maintain good ventilation.

7. Risk assess and plan ahead for all visits (inc homes, farms, and yards):

- Discuss plans in advance with clients and be clear about how you want to work and the safety measures you expect to have in place, such as ventilation, use of face coverings, and physical distancing.
- There is no expectation that vets should attend an infected or suspected Covid-19 household, in line with the RCVS Code supporting guidance (3.37f and 3.43).

8. Minimise the risks of vehicle sharing:

- Avoid vehicle sharing, if possible, or maintain maximum space between occupants.
- Regularly clean vehicles.

For the latest BVA updates please visit: www.bva.co.uk/coronavirus

For species-specific advice, please visit relevant veterinary associations' websites.