



Maryland Department of Agriculture

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Animal Industries and Consumer Services

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Updated Guidance for Maryland Veterinarians – Elective Procedures (May 7, 2020)

On March 22 and April 1, the Maryland State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners issued recommendations and guidance to the veterinary community as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We appreciate your cooperation during this difficult period and wholeheartedly thank those who are working diligently during this unprecedented time to maintain the health of our pets and animals.

Now that we are about two months into the pandemic, hospitals have implemented processes that promote safer interactions among clients, animals and staff. In addition, non-essential services – which we defined as those that could wait three months without a negative impact on an animal's health – are becoming essential as time goes on and veterinary care delayed. Accordingly, the Board is updating its guidance to reflect the continuing public health emergency and to avoid jeopardizing animal or public health.

The Governor's Stay at Home order remains in effect. Marylanders are required to maintain social distancing, keep crowds to 10 or fewer, and remain at home as much as possible. However, as of today, veterinary practices— including small animal and equine practices—may resume wellness and elective procedures providing facilities adhere to the following:

- Each veterinary facility **must** adhere to all [Executive Orders](#) and relevant CDC Guidelines for [social distancing](#) and [use of PPE](#). (Hospitals should consider the safety of staff as part of social distancing measures, and limit staff gatherings, such as eating in a common area.)
- We very strongly recommend that each facility develop and implement **written** protocols for how they are maintaining social distancing for staff and clients, including such things as curbside service, limited client interactions, and use of PPE. These protocols must be consistent with [CDC guidelines for veterinary clinics](#) and shared with each staff member. If the Board receives a complaint about your facility, the Board will ask to see these protocols.
- We understand that there are nuances to each individual clinic so the Board is unable to sign off on specific practices or conditions or approve specific procedures. Set written parameters that both meet your clinic's needs and upholds the letter and spirit of the Executive Orders.
- Responsibility for developing these protocols falls on the responsible veterinarian(s) and/or owners at each practice.
- Appropriate PPE must be used for all procedures in accordance with the standard of care. Elective procedures may **not** be done if there is insufficient PPE to meet the standard.
- ALL staff members (not just licensees) should always wear masks/face coverings in the hospital. Hospitals should provide masks to all staff members.
- Generally, veterinary hospitals should limit client access to the interior of the facility. However, if there are circumstances, such as euthanasia, when clients are interacting with staff indoors, clients should be required to wear cloth face coverings.
- Hospitals that have implemented curbside service should continue to do so.

Spay and Neuter Surgeries

Spay and neuter surgeries have been considered non-essential; however, they may be performed going forward provided the above written protocols are implemented and the standard of care is followed.

A Note About Grooming

The State of Maryland classifies routine pet grooming as non-essential, and therefore not permitted under the Governor's Executive Orders. However, a groomer may perform services if the client obtains documentation from a veterinarian that grooming is necessary for the health and well-being of the animal. We ask that you use your best judgment in deciding whether or not grooming is medically necessary for a particular animal. Your decision may be based on the breed, the animal's temperament, the length of time since the last grooming service, or other relevant factors. If you are uncomfortable providing documentation for a client to obtain grooming from an independent groomer based solely on the owner's representation, or if you have not seen the animal recently, you may require a physical exam via telehealth or in person. You may also charge a reasonable fee for any examination conducted or for providing the verification.

We appreciate the on-going cooperation of the veterinary community.

If you have any questions, the best way to contact us is through email.

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Board President and **equine** questions: Elizabeth.callahan@maryland.gov

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