

Veterinary Practices Are “Essential Businesses”

As states grapple with COVID-19 mitigation, questions have immediately arisen as to whether veterinary practices are considered “essential businesses.” The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), its 95,000 plus members, and key veterinary stakeholders urge that veterinary practices be considered “essential businesses” in cases where non-essential retail facilities are asked to close or repurpose personal protective equipment (PPE) due to COVID-19. Veterinary teams provide essential animal care, play a critical role in protecting the health of animals that enter the food supply, and serve as trusted members of the local community in disaster situations.

Last week, risk mitigation strategies to slow the spread of COVID-19 were announced by the [federal](#) government and many state and local governments. In some localities, such as [San Francisco](#), and states, like [Maryland](#) and [Pennsylvania](#), veterinary practices are appropriately considered “essential businesses.” They recognized that the services veterinary teams provide are critical to animal and public health, and thereby specifically designated veterinary practices as “essential businesses,” in line with other healthcare providers, supermarkets, and pharmacies. We urge all authorities to similarly designate veterinary practices as essential businesses, and also ensure their ability to obtain necessary medical supplies.

Veterinary practices provide the following essential services:

1. Frontline veterinary practitioners and staff are among the healthcare professionals who provide surveillance for diseases deemed [reportable](#) by state and federal governments, including [zoonotic diseases](#), such as rabies, influenza and Lyme Disease. They are also responsible for issuing certificates of veterinary inspection that are required for the movement of animals between [states](#) and [countries](#), including those entering the food supply.
2. Veterinarians are an integral part of our nation’s food and fiber industries. Veterinary care is critical to ensure that only healthy animals enter the food supply. While primarily housed on farms, food animals are also present in urban areas.
3. Veterinary practices provide medical and surgical care daily for critically ill and injured animals.
4. Veterinarians provide care for service and therapy animals, supporting both animal and human welfare.
5. Veterinarians also oversee the care of laboratory animals, which are critical to research that leads to the development of pharmaceuticals and biologics, including vaccines such as those currently being developed to combat COVID-19.
6. Veterinarians care for rare, threatened, and endangered animals in zoos, aquaria, wildlife rehabilitation clinics, and wildlife facilities. Even if such entities need to be closed to the public for COVID-19 mitigation, veterinarians and animal care staff must continue to care for these animals.
7. Veterinarians and our support staff are trusted professionals involved in disaster situations. While perhaps different from a statutory and regulatory perspective, the training, education, and experience of veterinarians and our staff in disasters are clearly transferrable skills in whatever COVID-19 risk mitigation is deemed necessary.

For the reasons listed above, we urge lawmakers and state executives to protect and preserve public health and ensure that veterinary practices are clearly stated to be “essential businesses” and thereby allowed to continue to provide critical services in our communities.