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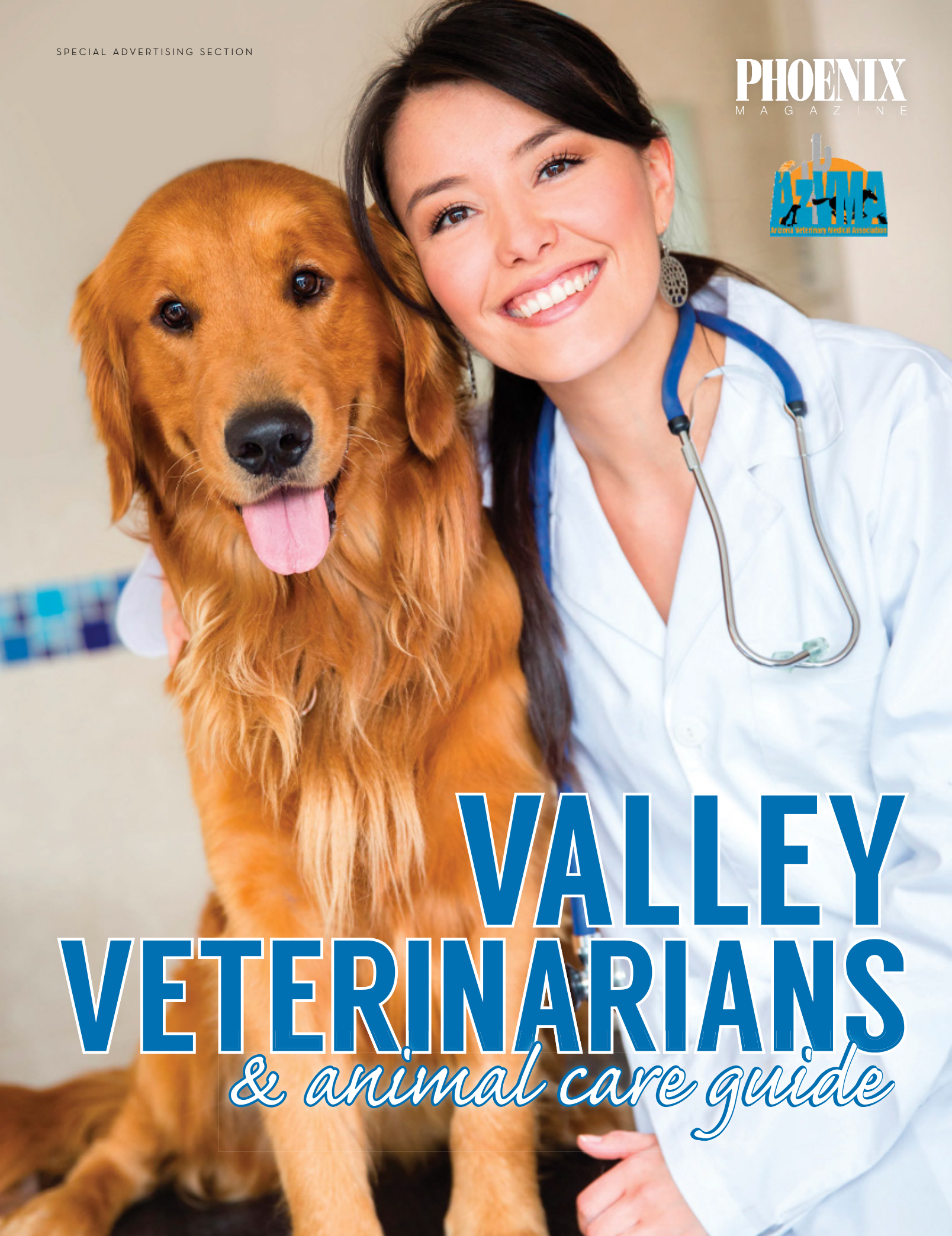

VALLEY VETERINARIANS

& animal care guide

We all love our pets. From furry dogs and cats, to hamsters, horses, lizards and parakeets, each pet is special to its owner. We feed and groom them, walk them, play with them, and in return they give us companionship. Nothing quite compares to a dog that excitedly welcomes you at the door, a cat purring and rubbing against your leg, or a horse running to the fence to greet you – each can put a smile on your face at the end of a hard day.

Pets depend on us to provide what they need, including food, water, exercise, a safe environment and medical care. The information that follows addresses contemporary pet health issues, such as raw and grain-free diets, valley fever, caring for older pets and more. Making informed decisions can make a significant difference in the quality of life your pet enjoys. Talk to your veterinarian about questions you may have about your pet's health.

The bucket list: maintaining quality of life in older pets

Better health care has allowed pets to live longer, healthier lives. As pets age, there are changes that can be seen outwardly, like gray hair, stiff joints and cloudy eyes. As those outward changes happen, there are also changes inside your pet that can have a significant effect on their quality of life.

In older pets, the immune system does not function as well, increasing the risk of infection. Endocrine organs, such as the thyroid gland and adrenal glands, can have decreased or abnormal function. As organ function decreases, dietary requirements change; so a senior pet may need a lower protein diet or fewer calories.

An easy way to tell if your pet may have an undiagnosed disease that could be affecting his quality of life is to watch his appetite, activity level and attitude.

A healthy older pet will continue to eat meals with gusto. Broken or infected teeth can cause pain and make pets eat less. Bloodwork is recommended to make sure that kidney and liver function are normal and that there are no other silent signs of illness.

Arthritis can cause pets to rise slowly, limp or be unable to jump up onto furniture as easily as they used to. A new limp or signs of pain should be evaluated by your veterinarian to make sure that there isn't a more significant problem in a bone or organs.

If your pet isn't greeting you when you get home, it could be that he doesn't hear as well as he used to, but if you have to go searching for him on a regular basis, he may be hiding because he doesn't feel well.

Regular checkups with your veterinarian can help to maintain your pet's good health. Your veterinarian will check your pet's eyes, teeth, heart, lungs, abdomen and overall physical condition. Any abnormalities can be further evaluated at that time; disease caught early may be more easily treated or managed. Older pets often have more than one problem at a time, and your veterinarian will recommend options for managing multiple problems. A pet's quality of life is determined by his owner, and your veterinarian is your best resource to discuss any concerns about changes that you notice in your pet. Even small changes can be important in older pets. Ask your veterinarian about the quality of life scale – a list of questions ranking your pet in areas such as pain, appetite, mobility and behavior – which can help you determine your pet's current quality of life.



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Valley fever and your pets: What you need to know

The medical name for valley fever is coccidioidomycosis (often shortened to cocci). Valley fever is a disease that affects people and some animals. In the U.S., it is primarily contracted in the low desert regions of Arizona, New Mexico, southwestern Texas and the central deserts of California. It is primarily a disease of the lungs caused by the fungus, Coccidioides, which grows in soils in areas of low rainfall, high summer temperatures and moderate winter temperatures.

How do animals get valley fever?

Fungal spores in the soil become airborne when the soil is disturbed by winds, construction, farming and other activities. Infection occurs when a spore is inhaled. Within the lung, the fungal organism grows and bursts, releasing more fungal organisms. The sickness related to valley fever occurs when the immune system does not kill the organisms quickly, and they continue to spread in the lungs and sometimes throughout the animal's body.

What animals are known to get the disease?

Dogs comprise the vast majority of animal valley fever cases. Llamas and alpacas are very susceptible; cats and horses also can become infected. Even animals that are primarily indoor pets are at risk because fungal spores are so small, they cannot be kept out of the house.

Is valley fever contagious from animal to animal, or animal to human?

Valley fever is considered a noncontagious disease. Even if multiple animals or humans are affected in a household, each infection was acquired by inhaling spores from the soil. Coughing cannot spread it between animals or people.

What are the possible symptoms of valley fever in animals?

- coughing
- fever
- weight loss
- lack of appetite
- lack of energy
- limping
- pain
- seizures
- non-healing wounds

How is my pet diagnosed?

Valley fever can be difficult to diagnose. After a thorough history and physical examination, your veterinarian may suggest a complete blood count, a chemistry panel to check organ function and a valley fever titer. The valley fever test can be falsely negative early in the infection, so it may need to be repeated several weeks later. Additional diagnostic tests – such as lung or leg X-rays, abdominal ultrasound, sample collection from the lungs, or even an MRI for suspected brain infection – may be recommended.

What can I do to prevent my pet from getting valley fever?

There is no way to prevent your pet from getting valley fever. Being aware of symptoms and taking your pet to your veterinarian at the first sign of illness is recommended.

Information provided by Lisa Shubitz, D.V.M., and the Valley Fever Center for Excellence. To learn more about valley fever in humans and animals, visit vfce.arizona.edu.





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Hot topics in veterinary nutrition: The myths and the realities

MYTH 1: Corn is a "filler" that is not digested and bad for my pet.
A "filler" is an ingredient that does not have any nutritional value or benefit. Corn (and other grains) contributes protein, fiber, vitamins and minerals; when properly prepared, it is a highly digestible (more than 97 percent) carbohydrate source. People have attributed food allergies to corn. Documented food allergies are quite rare (approximately 1 percent of all skin disease). When they do occur, most are caused by animal-based protein ingredients, such as beef, dairy or chicken rather than by plant-based ingredients.

MYTH 2: Grain-free is the way to be.
Many grain-containing diets are comparable in nutritional profiles to grain-free diets. Many grain-free formulations use tapioca, pea or potato in place of cornmeal or oats. However, potato and tapioca often contain less protein and more sugars than grains themselves, such as cornmeal. Grains are an uncommon source of food allergies (see Myth 1). Many grain-free diets are calorie-dense, and as a result can contribute to weight management issues. Overall, grain-free may be the right choice for your pet if your dog has an intolerance to grains or a need for a low carbohydrate diet. But remember that grain-free diets do not offer health benefits over grain-containing diets.

MYTH 3: Avoid animal byproducts; it means poor quality food.
The American Association of Feed Control Officials, which oversees pet food ingredients, defines a meat byproduct as "the non-rendered clean parts, other than meat, derived from slaughtered mammals." Byproducts in pet food are animal organs, such as liver, lungs and bone. These organs may be higher in essential nutrients and more palatable to animals. Hooves, horns, teeth, hair and feces do not constitute "meat byproduct." These elements are not included in high-quality pet food. Byproducts often are presented as treats. Rawhide, pig ears or bully sticks are, by definition, byproducts.

MYTH 4: Raw-meat diets are healthier.
There is currently no scientific evidence to suggest that the benefits of a raw diet outweigh the potential risks. Potential risks of a raw-meat diet include gastroenteritis (vomiting and diarrhea) from high dietary fat; bacterial infection from salmonella or clostridium; sepsis; and fractured teeth from large bone fragments. Up to 44 percent of commercial raw pet diets are contaminated with salmonella, which can be shed in feces and cause disease in pets and also be transmitted to humans.

So what should you feed your pet?
The best resource for nutritional information is your veterinarian, who will consider your pet's current health status and lifestyle to offer the most appropriate suggestions on selecting a brand and type of food. Veterinarians have access to the latest nutritional research and will select a pet food company based on where the food is manufactured, the company's quality controls, and whether the company conducts research to make continued improvements to their diets. Veterinarians are trained professionals with your pet's best interest in mind.



Information provided is not to be taken as veterinary medical advice for your pet. The Arizona Veterinary Medical Association and its representatives strongly suggest that you seek advice and counsel from your veterinarian for all matters regarding your pet, and cannot be held responsible for anything owners do for or with their animals as a result of information in this publication. Only your veterinarian can provide appropriate medical advice, treatment and proper care recommendations for your pet.



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Dr. Kathy Orr is a graduate if the University of California, Davis with 20 years of experience as Phoenix Zoo veterinarian and 20 years of experience treating pet animals. She is the founder of Liberty Wildlife Rehabilitation Foundation, providing care to native Arizona Wildlife for 30+ years. Dr. Orr's love of all animals and her broad experience means she is a good choice to care for your special companion.

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Wellness tips

Improper diet is the underlying cause of most **health problems in birds.** A seed diet is nutritionally deficient and can be contaminated with insecticides, mold and bacteria. A healthy diet for a bird should be at least 80 percent high-quality, undyed, formulated pellets; the rest can include dark-green leafy vegetables (kale, collard greens) and yellow meaty vegetables (squash, sweet potatoes).

The **price of horse feed** such as hay and grain has doubled in the past several years, with a 120-pound bale of alfalfa hay currently costing about $14-$16. An average sized 1,000-pound horse without access to pasture grass requires roughly 15-30 pounds of hay per day. Certain horses, such as seniors and performance horses, may require grain. The grain requirement varies from 10 to 20 pounds daily in these horses, depending on how much hay is in the diet. Ways to reduce feeding costs include: annual dental care by a veterinarian to ensure the teeth are well-aligned, allowing enhanced nutrient absorption; and distributing hay on mats or in feeders (which also helps avoid sand ingestion and sand colic). The overfed/obese horse is at increased risk of developing colic, colitis, enteritis, obesity and laminitis.

You are with your pet every day. Monitor your pet's appetite, thirst, stools and behavior. Many **signs of illness** are very subtle. Even minor changes can give your veterinarian valuable information about your pet's health. Your vigilance may help your veterinarian detect the early stages of a disease or condition when it can be treated easily.

Microchipping your pet may help you find them if they become lost. Remember to keep your information updated with current phone numbers and address. If you find a lost pet, many veterinary hospitals will scan them for a microchip as a courtesy. You may be able to help a lost pet and their owner reunite.

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Q: How can I evaluate the capabilities of a veterinarian to determine if he or she is right for my pet?

A: Great question! We understand that choosing the right doctor for your pet(s) can be daunting. Here are a few recommendations:

Start with their credentials and training. Where did they obtain their veterinary degree? Did they also do an internship for additional training? Did they complete a residency and become a board-certified specialist? What sort of training does their staff have? Are they an American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) Accredited practice? Are they open nights, weekends and holidays to accept emergencies? Do they regularly invest in new technologies to offer the latest options in treatment? Regardless of your particular situation, all of these areas of competency are worth investigating to feel confident you are making the best choice for your pet.

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Dr. Pullen earned his doctor of veterinary medicine degree from Colorado State University and a post-doctoral master's degree in surgery from the University of California at Davis. Dr. Pullen offers extensive experience in all aspects of surgery, as well as internal medicine and general health care, emphasizing professionalism and "university level" care for his patients and clients.

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DC Ranch Animal Hospital is a full-service, independently owned, small-animal hospital. Dr. Bartz and her team of Veterinary Technicians and client service representatives are dedicated to providing your pet the best care available by emphasizing high quality medicine and client communication.

Dr. Bartz is a graduate of University of Wisconsin School of Veterinary Medicine and a certified veterinary acupuncturist. She particularly enjoys dentistry, soft tissue surgery and pain management.

Dr. Lopez is a graduate of Washington State University of Veterinary Medicine. She has taken an interest in making the practice more feline friendly. Cats need extra compassion and care to alleviate the anxiety some experience during their visit.

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Samantha B. Thurman, D.V.M.

Dr. Samantha Thurman received her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree from Kansas State University in 1997 and has been practicing in the Valley for more than 16 years. Desert Sage Veterinary Clinic is a full-service clinic that was established in 1988. It is located at 23rd Ave. and Bethany Home Road. Dr. Thurman purchased the clinic in November of 2004.

The clinic is a one-doctor practice that strives to achieve a family atmosphere for both you and your pet. Our staff strongly believes in customer service—our goal is to be there for you when you need us. Please feel free to look at our website or visit our Facebook page to see our list of services, hours, reviews and important links.

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-Dr. Thurman

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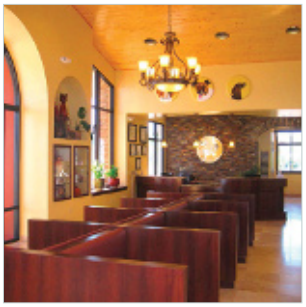

Matthew Hillebrand, D.V.M.

What to look for in choosing the right veterinarian.
There are several factors that go into making this important decision. Most pet owners assume that all veterinarians have knowledge of medicine and surgery. Therefore, you should look at all of the other people who make up a veterinary hospital. It's a fact that veterinary team members reflect the ideals and values of the veterinarian that you will be seeing.

Start with the front staff. Are they friendly and helpful? Do they have genuine concern for you and your pet? Next, evaluate the nursing staff. Do they seem professional? Do they take their time checking you in, or do you feel rushed? Finally, look at the veterinarian himself. I think the most important factor is a genuine concern. Does he really listen to your concerns? Do you feel he is compassionate?

Based on all of these factors, you will know which vet is right for you.



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Dr. Babcock, is a 1967 graduate of Colorado State University and 2011 AZVMA Vet of the Year. He established Palo Verde Animal Hospital in 1971. Doctors Babcock, John Samuelson, Tom Boggess and Sharon Ottman along with our team are committed to bringing your pet better health by practicing the science of veterinary medicine.

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Ironwood Animal Hospital

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1st Pet Veterinary Centers
Chandler - 480-732-0018
Mesa - 480-924-1123
Phoenix - 623-849-0700
1stpetvet.com

Banfield Pet Hospital
banfield.com

Eye Care for Animals
Avondale - 623-872-3937
Gilbert - 480-635-1110
Phoenix - 602-995-2871
Scottsdale - 408-990-EYES (3937)
North Scottsdale - 408-948-2362
eyecareforanimals.com