



## COVID-19 NJVMA Facebook Live Town Hall Meeting Notes

On Saturday, March 21, 2020, NJVMA hosted a Facebook live webinar featuring NJVMA President, Dr. Matthew Edson. Topics covered included how COVID-19 is affecting the veterinary profession in our state, and how the NJVMA is working to help affected constituents. Answers to member questions and concerns shared during the webinar are below; these should not be construed as legal advice and should not be acted upon without first consulting an expert.

### Essential Business

- Q:** New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy has issued [Executive Order No. 107](#), which directs additional closures of non-essential retail businesses. Are veterinary practices considered essential?
- A:** The NJ State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners (SBVME) has confirmed Veterinarians are legislatively considered health care providers in the state of New Jersey. NJVMA, AVMA and SBVME share the opinion that essential services are taking care of sick animals, medical concerns and emergent or urgent care. The Department of Homeland Security specifically mentions food animal veterinarians as people who are essential personnel. Cremation and medical waste services are also considered essential.
- Q:** What should we do if a police officer shows up and tells us we need to close despite veterinary medicine being ruled an essential service?
- A:** Governor Murphy signed [Executive Order No. 108](#), which invalidates any county or municipal restriction that in any way that will or might conflict with any of the provisions of Executive Order No. 107. Both Executive Orders went into effect at 9 p.m. on Saturday, March 21. The only exceptions are two categories over which municipalities or counties may impose any additional restrictions: 1) online marketplaces for arranging or offering lodging and 2) municipal or county parks.
- Q:** New Jersey residents have been told to stay home unless travel is essential. What should I do if I get pulled over by the police travelling to and from work?
- A:** NJVMA has created an [essential travel document](#). We recommend that you complete this document and carry it with you when travelling to and from work.

### Elective vs. Non-Elective Procedures

- Q:** What are some criteria I can use to help determine if a service is essential (non-elective)?
- A:** Dr. Aliza Simeone of PA's Bureau of Animal Health and Diagnostic Services has shared some questions to help in making these decisions:

#### **Questions to consider making decisions on elective vs. non-elective care**

- Is this procedure necessary to save the animal's life?
- Is this procedure, exam, test etc. necessary to alleviate pain or suffering?
- Does this prevent zoonotic disease?
- Can this case be managed in a way that mitigates the human health risks of COVID-19 transmission between the veterinary staff, owner, and their respective families and communities?
- Would this procedure require the use of scarce personal protective equipment resources needed for critical human medical care?
- Or can this patient safely wait until resources are less scarce and human health risks are lower?



- For non-elective cases that typically require the use of protective equipment like gloves and masks, please review the latest from the AVMA on the conservation of these supplies: Please go to <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19/guidelines-ppe-covid-19-pandemic-demand-exceeds> for the latest guidelines from AVMA on techniques for conservation of PPE.

**Q: What about rabies vaccines?**

**A:** There is no indicator that NJ will be waiving the rabies vaccine requirements. Any vaccination against a zoonotic disease should be considered essential.

**Q: SBVME rules state veterinarians must provide emergency care to clients they have an active VCPR with. Does this mean I have to stay open?**

**A:** No. While, as essential service providers, veterinary practices are allowed to stay open there is **no requirement that veterinary practices have to stay open**. If you do choose to close or are unable to provide emergency care for some clients make sure you provide reasonable options for emergency clinics. **Confirm the clinics you refer clients to are open and functioning** as not all clinics are open at this time.

#### Office/Hospital/Clinic Protocols

**Q: The state is encouraging people to report businesses that are not respecting social distancing protocol. Can you provide some guidance to help incorporate social distancing into my practice?**

**A:** The NJVMA has provided tips to implement social distancing and infection control at your practice in the document [COVID-19 And NJ Veterinary Practices](#). At this point most practices are going to curbside check-in. If you do see patients while your clients remain in their cars, we strongly recommend checking with your insurance provider to make sure you have adequate animal bailee coverage. An example of an exception to allowing pet owners into your building is euthanasia cases. You also may want to consider splitting your practice team into two that way if you have exposure on one half of your team you still have some people left to operate your facility.

**Q: Should veterinarians continue making house calls?**

**A:** For essential services, yes, if you can do so safely while following infection control and social distancing procedures. There is some added risk in entering an environment that you cannot clean and disinfect on your own but you're also keeping people away from other folks.

**Q: How far out do you think practices should be rescheduling appointments for wellness visits and other non-essential visits?**

**A:** Rancocas Veterinary Associates is scheduling for four weeks from now and telling clients we may need to adjust this.

**Q: How can I apply for an SBA emergency loan?**

**A:** Visit the [U.S. SBA website](#) for information on eligibility and to apply for a disaster relief loan.

## Telemedicine

**Q: Can I serve my patients through telemedicine?**

**A:** The telemedicine guidelines that have been developed by the state for veterinarians have been approved but not adopted. The SBVME has said we can use the [proposed rules](#) as a guideline. The NJVMA agrees with the AVMA position that telemedicine is a useful adjunct for providing care to patients that already have a physically-established VCPR within the last 12 months. When practicing telemedicine, you should feel you can provide the same level of care that you could provide in an in-person exam. You must maintain the same medical records you would maintain for an in-person exam. While discussions on pricing are prohibited, we do recommend that practitioners charge for telemedicine services.

## Staffing

**Q: Are there guidelines for when an employee can use paid sick leave for situations specifically related to COVID-19?**

**A:** The state has provided a specific [document](#) to address this. What qualifies for paid sick leave is broad including an employee who decides they are not comfortable going out and having social exposure. The NJVMA has worked with a labor attorney to distill the new federal rules in the [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) into a [digestible document](#).

**Q: How will temporary worker furloughs or a reduction in scheduled hours affect my employee's eligibility for my practice's health insurance program?**

**A:** You should check with your health insurance provider. The provider for the NJVMA health insurance program (Association Master Trust or AMT) has reassured us that temporary furloughs will not affect employee eligibility for their health insurance program. We have asked AMT to provide program participants with detailed information on how changes in employment status might impact their insurance and timely updates related to COVID-19.

**Q: Are there guidelines for staff wearing PPE?**

**A:** AVMA has some [recommendations](#) but there are not strict guidelines. Wearing gloves is going to limit your contact with picking things up with your hands. If you are wearing a mask the recommendation has been to keep the mask on instead of taking the mask on and off as when you take a mask on and off you are touching your face and aerosolizing particles. Remember we are really trying to conserve PPE as much as possible in case it is needed on the human side.

**Q: What if a staff member has come into contact to someone who might be infected?**

**A:** There are some guidelines on the DOH website for people who have had [close contact with COVID-19 positive individuals](#). There's also a page on the DOH website with [COVID-19 information for healthcare professionals](#). We recommend that you speak with your physical and local health provider with any questions not answered by these resources.

## Licenses

**Q: Have the rules been changed regarding license portability?**

**A:** This is being discussed. We will email the membership and post an update on the NJVMA website if the rules are changed to allow veterinarians to cross state lines through license reciprocity.



**Q: Is the State Board still working on licensing applications?**

**A:** Yes. The board does ask that applications be filed electronically as they are experiencing delays in physical delivery.

#### CE Requirements

**Q: With so many CE events cancelled I'm worried about getting enough credits. Will the SBVME be making any temporary changes to the CE requirements for license renewal?**

**A:** Changes in the [current CE requirements](#) should not be necessary. New Jersey's next licensing cycle is not until next summer (2021) so we should have plenty of time to get continuing education. There is no limit on the number of hours that can be obtained online. Unfortunately, the NJVMA Veterinary Education Conference had to be cancelled. The NJVMA is looking into providing additional online CE options later in the year.

#### Animals as Carriers

**Q: Can animals who have been exposed to people who are COVID-19 positive carry the virus on their fur?**

**A:** While we are not aware of any controlled studies on this, experts believe the virus could remain stable on animal fur for up to a few hours. Presumably bathing should remove the pathogen but again, there are no controlled studies.

#### Equine Issues

**Q: I'm an equine practitioner in New Jersey. Where can I find guidance?**

**A:** The NJAEP has created a document of [Guidelines for NJ Equine Veterinarians during COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

**Q: What about boarding facilities for horses?**

**A:** Please see [Secretary Fisher Equine Industry Letter](#) for COVID-19

**Q: Are farriers considered essential service providers?**

**A:** Farriers have not been specified as essential but can apply to be considered essential with the state

#### PPE

**Q: Who can I contact if I want to donate PPE?**

**A:** Several local hospitals will gladly accept donations of PPE. You can also contact your county [Office of Emergency Management](#). VECCS has created two [databases](#) that can be shared that list the veterinary ventilators and veterinary CRRT machines around the country. The State of NJ also has a portal to list donations: <https://covid19.nj.gov/ppereport>