



# Ontario calls state of emergency and implements additional lockdown provisions

In light of the exponential increase in COVID-19 cases, the Province of Ontario has declared a second state of emergency to last for the next 28 days, with the possibility of an extension.

The province has enacted a stay-at-home order to commence Thursday, Jan. 14, at 12:01 a.m., which will require individuals to stay at home except for essential purposes (e.g. going to the grocery store, pharmacy, health-care appointments) or to work, if they're considered an essential service worker.

**Veterinary practices are still considered essential workplaces and may remain open. Based on the information currently available, bringing a pet to the veterinarian qualifies as an essential purpose for an individual to leave their home.**

### Further measures that will affect veterinary clinics:

- Individuals are required to wear a mask or face covering in indoor areas of businesses or organizations that are open. Wearing a mask or face covering is now recommended outdoors when you cannot physically distance more than two metres. **This means veterinary staff will be required to always wear a mask both inside the clinic and outdoors for curbside pick ups/drop offs.**
- The Ministry of Labour will be increasing workplace inspections to ensure businesses are following all health and safety guidelines. Those businesses that do not comply with the *Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act* and public health guidance could be subject to fines, closures and/or prosecution.

For more information on other provisions, [visit the government's website](#).

### What does this mean for veterinary practices?

Veterinary service as still deemed essential. Practices will still be able to offer a range of medical services, including annual physical examinations, vaccinations, spays and neuters, etc. Services can only be offered using curbside drop-off and pickup of the animal. Practices are encouraged to use telemedicine whenever practical.

**Q. Can clients come into the practice?**

A. Given the stay-at-home order, clients should **not** be entering the clinic unless it's for a pet's euthanasia, however, practices should limit the number of clients attending euthanasia appointments. Ensure all public health measures are followed, including physical distancing, screening, personal protective equipment (PPE), face coverings and safety plans.

**Q. What about having clients coming into the practice to pay for services?**

A. Payment for services provided by curbside drop-off and pickup should be taken without having the client enter the practice. This can be done via a wireless terminal, taking information over the phone, etc.

**Q. Can the practice still offer grooming services?**

A. No, unless grooming is deemed necessary for medical reasons (e.g. an animal needs to be shaved as a result of severe matting, ingrown toenails need to be trimmed, etc.). If grooming is required, it must be done by veterinary practice staff, not a groomer operating a separate business, even if the groomer operates out of the same building as the practice.

**Q. What about house calls?**

A. If the house call is necessary for the immediate and urgent health and welfare of the animal (e.g. you are assessing or treating a sick or injured animal or performing a euthanasia), you may enter the client's home. Other types of appointments (e.g. annual physicals) should be done outside the home or postponed until after the lockdown.

**Q. Does this affect veterinarians that are monitoring large food-producing animals?**

A. Herd health and on-site farm visits can take place for food-producing animals. Masks and PPE are required to be worn, and social distancing must be maintained with farm staff. For more information and guidelines, [visit the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs website](#).

For more information and resources, [visit OVMA's Coronavirus FAQ page](#) or view [OVMA's Guide to Mitigating the Risk of Infection in Veterinary Practices During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#). If you have additional questions, email [info@ovma.org](mailto:info@ovma.org).

*This information is current as of January 12, 2021 at 2:20pm.*

**A staff member may have COVID-19. Now what?**

OVMA has received numerous inquiries regarding potential staff exposures and has created [an article](#) with cases scenarios and guidance for members.

Having a staff member test positive for COVID-19 doesn't automatically mean other staff will be required to self-isolate. A contact tracer will be assigned to individuals who test positive for the virus and will evaluate exposure risk to all individuals who may have been in contact with the case-positive individual. Public Health will provide further direction based on the risk assessment with regards to quarantining and COVID-19 testing.

If staff have been following proper protocols (e.g. wearing masks, sanitizing workstations, keeping six feet apart when possible, etc.), the risk of exposure would be low. **Clinics who are concerned about potential exposure to COVID-19 should contact Public Health for more direction, as each situation will be unique.** Visit Public Health's website to [find your local Public Health unit](#).



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