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COVID-19 checklist for clinics

The COVID-19 outbreak is necessitating significant changes in how veterinary practices carry out their day-to-day activities. It will also require practices to plan for possible contingencies, including the potential temporary closure of the practice. To assist members in this regard, OVMA has developed the following checklist, setting out actions a practice should take to safeguard employees and clients and plan for the future.

While the checklist is intended to cover the most important topics for practices to consider, it's not exhaustive. Additional information can be found on OVMA's [Coronavirus FAQ](#) web page, which is constantly being updated so check it frequently.

PRACTICE CHECKLIST

Employees

- Review infection prevention and control best practices with all employees. An extensive list of measures to consider can be found on the [Government of Canada's website](#).
- Establish a practice policy regarding when a staff member should not to come to work. For example, if:
 - they have recently travelled out-of-country (the Canadian government is requesting all such individuals to self-isolate for 14 days).
 - they are exhibiting any of the symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, difficulty breathing).
 - they have had close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.
 - they have a household member who is exhibiting symptoms of the virus and is awaiting testing/test results are directed to stay home and advise all staff of the policy.

Important note: An employer should not send an employee home or ask them not to work because of concerns over COVID-19 unless the concerns are reasonable and consistent with the most recent advice from medical and public health officials. For more information on this topic, view the Ontario Human Rights Commission's [policy statement](#).

- Review the practice's employee sick leave policy, amend as appropriate in recognition of the current situation, and ensure that staff are aware of the policy.
- Ensure that all staff contact information is up to date in case the practice needs to be closed on short notice.
- Discuss contingency plans with staff who have children in daycare centres that may be closed, or who have children affected by the two-week school closure period (March 23 to April 3).
- Make staff aware of the mental health and other support services available through OVMA's Member Assistance Program (available to OVMA members and their immediate family members) and the resiliency and mental well-being resources available at i-matter.ca (available to all practice staff).

Clients and patients

- Let clients know how the clinic is keeping clients and patients safe (i.e. extra disinfecting of surfaces, implementing social distancing protocols, etc.). This should be done via email and/or text messaging, the practice's social media channels, as well as outside and in-clinic signage.
- When booking an appointment, ask the client if he/she has recently been out of Canada, or is currently exhibiting any respiratory symptoms associated with COVID-19. If so, the practice may wish to use this [Patient Screening Pathways Chart](#) developed by Dr. Scott Weese to determine the most appropriate course of action.
- When sending out appointment reminders by email or text, ask the client to advise the practice if he/she has recently travelled outside of Canada or is exhibiting any COVID-19 symptoms, so that appropriate precautions can be taken. Also ask clients to refrain from bringing other family members/people with them for their appointment.
- To the extent possible, encourage social distancing in-clinic. Move waiting room chairs further apart, avoid shaking hands and, to the extent possible, instruct staff to maintain a two-metre (six feet) distance from clients.
- Offer hand sanitizer to clients and sanitize merchant card machines as often as practical.
- Determine the practice's protocol for dealing with clients/patients arriving with a perceived risk of COVID-19. The Ontario Veterinary College has such a [protocol](#).
- Consider establishing a policy on pet food sales to reduce hoarding (e.g. limiting clients to a two-month supply of food per pet).
- Consider offering clients the ability to conduct certain types of appointments virtually by text, phone or videoconference.
- Consider how the practice will handle clients in isolation or quarantine, or who are immunocompromised, if their pets need medical attention. Options include telemedicine, making arrangements for someone else to bring in the pet and offering curbside service.

Practice supplies

Veterinary Purchasing has advised OVMA that it has no inventory of surgical masks, and that masks may not be replenished until this summer. The inventory of surgical gloves is also low.

- Consider re-using masks to extend the lifespan of your current supply (see Dr. Scott Weese's [Worms & Germs](#) blog on the subject).
- Consider whether to postpone elective procedures that require use of a mask and gloves.

- While practices should avoid hoarding products, ensure you have a reasonable supply of other essential products in case of supply chain interruptions.

OVMA has also received reports of surgical masks being stolen from veterinary clinics. Practices should keep masks in a secure location during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Practice disruption

Many veterinary clinics will experience staff shortages due to COVID-19, and it's not currently apparent how long the current disruption will last. Practices should consider how the virus might affect operations over the next few months.

- Critically analyze your appointment capacity and demand on a routine basis to ensure you can provide adequate veterinary care and maintain profitability.
- Consider limiting business hours, reducing the density of appointments, or triaging cases based on your ability to deliver care.
- Consider postponing non-emergent patients or routine elective procedures.

Practice closing contingency planning

Various levels of government are considering a mandatory shutdown of all non-essential services for a period of time to limit community spread of the disease. OVMA is currently in talks with the Province of Ontario regarding potential exemptions for veterinary services if such a shutdown should occur.

Nevertheless, your practice must have a contingency plan in case it's no longer able to provide services to clients for a period of time, either due to a mandatory shutdown or a need to quarantine practice staff due to exposure to the virus.

Every practice's plan will be different, but should include:

- A plan setting out if and how staff would be compensated during a practice shutdown. (**Note:** OVMA is currently reviewing employment law on this subject and will provide additional advice to practices as soon as possible).
- A communication strategy for reaching staff and clients should there be a disruption in service.
- An arrangement with another practice willing to service your clients while the practice is closed. As there could be multiple practices affected, it's advisable to make such arrangements with more than one other practice.
- Pre-scripting a "practice is closed" auto-attendant message for the practice's phone system and ensuring that the message can be changed remotely (if possible) in case the practice needs to be closed on short notice.
- Arranging a means of accessing patient medical records remotely and making those records available to other practices as needed. If your practice doesn't currently possess that capability, ask your practice management software provider for assistance.
- A plan for stopping mail and other deliveries to the practice.
- Ensuring that appropriate signage is posted on practice doors, etc. regarding the closure.
- A plan to advise staff and clients when the practice re-opens.

Assistance during the COVID-19 outbreak

The COVID-19 outbreak is resulting in swift and significant changes in all aspects of society. During the outbreak, OVMA will do its best to keep members up to date on the latest developments. Because things are changing so rapidly, information contained in NewsHound may quickly become out of date. For the latest information, always go to OVMA's [Coronavirus FAQ](#) web page.

For the duration of the COVID-19 outbreak, OVMA staff are here to answer your questions and offer any other assistance you need. You can contact us via email (info@ovma.org) or phone (1.800.670.1702), and we will get back to you as soon as possible.



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