**Veterinary medicine in Nova Scotia during a State of Emergency FAQ (Updated April 17, 2020)**

**Are veterinarians able to practice during the current COVID-19 pandemic?**

Currently all veterinarians in Nova Scotia are able to practice as long as they are abiding by the order that was issued by the Department of Health through the Health Protection Act.   Veterinary medicine in the province has been deemed to be an essential service, and veterinarians have been ordered by the Nova Scotia Government to operate under a restricted scope of practice during the state of emergency.  At the present time, the NSVMA has directed that veterinary services are restricted to urgent/essential care in an effort to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protect the public. Elective procedures and non-urgent care will be postponed until considered safe to do so. This directive is to protect the health and well-being of Nova Scotians and to ensure that veterinary medicine can continue to be an essential service providing urgent care to animals in need.

**What constitutes urgent/essential care at this time?**

There is no standard list to what constitutes urgent/essential care – we have asked veterinarians to use their professional judgement to determine what constitutes urgent/essential care. Generally, urgent care includes services that alleviates animal pain and suffering and prevents imminent threat of death to an animal. The NSVMA has recommended that veterinarians follow guidelines published by zoonotic disease/public health microbiologist Dr. Scott Weese, who is the chief of infection control at the Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph. The guideline is titled “Veterinary Medicine During a Time of Restriction of Elective Services and Social Distancing”. The document is available here: <https://www.wormsandgermsblog.com/files/2020/04/COVID-guidelines-essential-elective_social-distancing_Apr7-1.pdf>

Dr. Weese’s website has several useful articles for pet owners that applies to pets and COVID-19 that may be of interest. We encourage you to explore the information available on his website (<https://www.wormsandgermsblog.com/>)

**How are practices operating to protect the public at this time?**

Most practices in Nova Scotia have a closed-door policy at this time. This means that they are restricting access to veterinary hospitals to the public (with the exception of end of life care). This practice helps to promote social distancing. Many practices are also offering the option of telemedicine through electronic means to provide care while reducing the requirement for travel and risk of exposure to the public. Please contact your veterinarian to confirm what policies they have instituted at this time and what services are available.

**Are veterinarians able to refill prescription medications and diets at this time?**

Yes – please contact your veterinarian for more information. Many veterinarians are offering curbside delivery of food and medication orders to ensure physical distancing. Some are also able to offer home delivery. Many veterinarians are limiting food and prescription supplies to one-month supply at a time to ensure that adequate supplies are available for all pet owners.

**What about puppy and kitten vaccines? Are these allowed at this time?**

On April 9, 2020 the NSVMA made recommendations to veterinarians that vaccinations for puppies and kittens 8 weeks of age and older are considered essential and are permissible under the current scope of practice, as long as proper precautions are taken to limit potential risks to the general public and veterinary staff. This recommendation was based upon discussion with a professor of immunology at the Atlantic Veterinary College as well as the acknowledgement that the current state of emergency (issued March 22,2020) will likely continue longer than we can safely delay these vaccinations for these young animals.

**What about adult vaccinations for cats and dogs? Are these allowed at this time?**

For adult animals who are due for boosters, we are asking veterinarians to use their judgement if these boosters can be safely delayed based upon their vaccination history to date and risk of exposure. Leptospirosis and Lyme disease are emergent diseases in Nova Scotia which are more prevalent in some areas than others. Due to the zoonotic nature of these diseases they may also be considered essential vaccinations in certain regions.

**Can animals be spayed or neutered at this time?**

Elective spaying and neutering are considered non-essential at this time and can be safely delayed in most situations. There are certain urgent health conditions which may necessitate spaying or neutering (such as pyometra) which are permissible. The government of Nova Scotia has amended the Health Protection Act recently to state that “only veterinary surgeons and veterinary physicians engaged in not-for-profit practice may carry out spay and neuter surgeries.”

The NSVMA understands the concerns of the public with the order to postpone elective surgical procedures especially when it involves animal population control. The current recommendation to postpone elective spay/neuter programs is not unique to Nova Scotia as jurisdictions all over North America have made similar recommendations. We encourage pet owners to read the following document that was written by a leading shelter medicine veterinarian at the University of Florida to understand why it is important to delay elective spay/neuter programs at this time: <https://sheltermedicine.vetmed.ufl.edu/2020/03/29/why-must-we-suspend-spay-neuter-surgery-during-the-pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR3ndgiQhmP8vHoUDgiavyTJ8brTBAxPPRqqeaWBI0Su_nIVx8d5Hp-QDwY>

**How is large animal practice adapting to the current pandemic?**

Food animal veterinarians provide a necessary service to ensure safety of the food supply chain that cannot be disrupted during this time. These veterinarians are continuing to practice while taking necessary precautions for their safety as well as the safety of the public. If you have specific questions regarding food animal practice, please contact your veterinarian directly.

For equine veterinarians, the NSVMA has asked that they use their knowledge of disease risk to determine appropriate timelines for vaccination including when vaccines are necessary (in particular for vector borne disease). Equine veterinarians continue to be available for urgent/essential cases and are also utilizing telemedicine when appropriate to provide care while minimizing risk to the public.

**When will veterinarians be able to practice as usual?**

The restricted scope of practice will continue until otherwise directed by government regulators. The NSVMA is monitoring the situation closely and continues to consider adjustments to our recommendations to our veterinary membership to meet the needs of the public and protect Nova Scotians while abiding to current government orders.