PRESS RELEASE

NOVA SCOTIA VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

COVID-19

April 19, 2020

Following the State of Emergency declaration on March 22, 2020, Veterinarians have had the arduous task of adjusting their scope of veterinary practice. As of April 13, 2020, the ORDER BY THE MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH UNDER SECTION 32 of the HEALTH PROTECTION ACT 2004, c. 4, s. 1. Clause 22 was amended as follows:

*“Effective March 26, 2020, all veterinarians, including veterinary surgeons and veterinary physicians engaged in for-profit and not-for-profit practice, may provide: (a.) in-patient emergency or urgent care services; (b.) essential veterinary supply chain services, such as prescription refills and prescription  diets; and (c.) virtual care services if authorized to provide this care within their scope of practice and as  established by their governing association, but only veterinary surgeons and veterinary physicians engaged in not-for-profit practice may carry out spay and neuter surgeries.”*

Veterinary services throughout Nova Scotia are adapting the services they offer to honour the intent of the Nova Scotia Government’s Order. Procedures and protocols such as curbside service, food and product pickups, contactless payment, veterinary teams working in small groups, and postponing non-urgent visits to reduce public exposure, among others, have been implemented.

Acknowledging that the Nova Scotia State of Emergency will likely continue for longer than we can safely delay vaccinations, changes have been made to what are considered urgent vaccines in Nova Scotia. The Nova Scotia Veterinary Medical Association (NSVMA), in consultation with a subject matter expert, considers that all puppy and kitten vaccinations are essential beginning at 8 weeks of age, and therefore meet the definition of urgent. Health certificates can also be issued to these animals at the time of these vaccinations. In addition, 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 as essential vaccinations in your region.

There is no specific list detailing what constitutes urgent or emergency care. Veterinarians must use their professional judgement to determine what constitutes urgent or emergency care. Generally, urgent care includes services that alleviate animal pain and suffering and prevents imminent threat of death to the animal. Under the state of emergency mandated by the Nova Scotia Government, procedures such as routine annual health visits, non-urgent examinations, dental cleanings, nail trims, and elective spays and neuters (exception to this is, spays and neuters performed for not-for-profit groups), are being postponed, as well as many other procedures that are not deemed as urgent or an emergency. The NSVMA and the Department of Health recognize the high priority the pet-owning public places on having their animals spayed or neutered. The NSVMA has been in discussion with the Department of Health concerning this elective procedure and have been assured by the Department of Health that, as soon as it is deemed safe and in the best interest of public health, some of the current restrictions on Veterinarians will be relaxed. Currently, elective spaying and neutering are considered non-essential and should be delayed, however, there are certain urgent health conditions which may necessitate spaying or neutering (such as pyometra) which are permissible.

The goal is to assist in keeping people at home. The NSVMA is continually evaluating the situation and the veterinary services being provided to ensure the health of the public is maintained. As more information becomes available, changes to longer term pandemic management may be necessary.

We hope that all animal owners will understand the extreme nature of this Pandemic and respect the very difficult decisions that Veterinarians must make during this time in the interest of public health.