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GUIDANCE FOR COMPANION ANIMAL RESCUE & REHOMING ORGANISATIONS

This guidance has been produced by the [Canine & Feline Sector Group](#) which consists of the UK's best loved national pet charities and experts, alongside the [Association of Dogs and Cats Homes](#), a membership organisation including charities and not for profit organisations of all sizes which develops good practice and seeks to support those working in the rescue and/or rehoming of dogs and cats, and with input from two leading equine charities. For further information please contact [ADCH](#) or [CFSG](#)

In accordance with Government guidance, companion animal rescue and rehoming organisations can remain open to provide for the ongoing needs of animals in their care.

This document provides guidance for rescue, rehoming centres and organisations that are working during the Covid-19 crisis and in the context of Government restrictions in respect of social distancing and essential travel. This Guidance is intended for rescue, rehoming centres and organisations that handle any or all companion animal species, including but not limited to dogs, cats, small furies and equines but not including wildlife. References to staff can be extended to include volunteers and other personnel involved in the operation of the rescue. The Guidance is in four sections, covering: the admission (intake) of animals into a rescue environment; the care of animals whilst in a rescue environment; veterinary care of animals in a rescue environment or to be rehomed; and the rehoming (adoption) of animals, including temporary placement in a foster home (or equivalent).

Individual rescue centres and organisations should consider this Guidance in the context of their operations and in the context of Government advice and instructions, that is subject to change.

Admissions (Intake) – covering animals coming into a rescue environment

- Intake demand may well exceed your capacity so try to only admit animals whose welfare is significantly compromised or at imminent risk in order to keep valuable spaces available.
- If an animal owner is seeking only temporary care for their animal, consider referring them to boarding facilities instead or organisations which offer assistance such as the [Cinnamon Trust](#).
- Only admit animals you have the skills and resource to care for. Ensure you have enough staff, allowing for possible sickness and holiday absence. Avoid over-crowding in your rescue centre.

- Reduce intake demand by supporting owners to keep their animals in the home environment where possible and work collaboratively with your Local Authorities and local rescues so you can share the burden between you. Consider taking in only those Local Authority stray dogs that have already served their statutory stray days.
- When the immediate crisis is over you may need to provide support over a longer term to enable other owners who are in difficulty to help them retain their pets.
- If you come across a large case of multiple animals in crisis, you don't need to face it alone. Get in touch with the rescue sector groups (see further information, below), who may be able to provide support and help co-ordinate a response.
- Owners are advised not to drive to a rescue centre to relinquish their animal since this doesn't constitute essential travel unless there are significant welfare, health or financial grounds. They should call the rescue centre first to discuss the best course of action and to ensure they have space. You may collect the animal providing you ensure social distancing with any member of the public and ensure adequate hygiene precautions are in place for your staff. Your staff or licensed transporters engaged to collect an animal should be easily identifiable with letters of authority and in uniform if provided.
- Where possible and ahead of collection, assess the animal's fitness to travel and identify any health and behaviour needs to inform the most appropriate care for the animal and ensure you can meet those needs. This may include consideration of euthanasia as a welfare outcome for animals with particularly challenging needs.
- Plan how to carry out the collection safely. If appropriate, book an appointment date and time. Collect the animal in a secure way which maintains at least a two-metre distance between people. Collect the animal from a large room or an outdoor space if possible. Minimise touching the animal. Wear disposable gloves for the duration of the collection and dispose of them appropriately afterwards. Use the CFSG [handover protocol](#) where possible.
- Additionally, if collecting an animal from a Coronavirus-positive person or household, you should wear appropriate protective equipment. This equipment should be thoroughly cleaned or disposed of appropriately following the collection and you should wash your hands for 20 seconds using soap and water.
- When the animal has arrived at your centre, avoid it contacting other animals, bathe them or wipe them down with a pet safe cloth, if appropriate for the species, and dispose of it properly afterwards. If unable to do this, and for all animals arriving from a Coronavirus-positive household, quarantine for three days (72 hours) and during this time the animal should only be handled by staff wearing appropriate protection. Those animals should be dealt with **after** all other animals. Any holding areas should be cleaned and disinfected after use.
- All leads, collars, carriers and other equipment that has had contact with the animal should be cleaned with soap and water, disinfected and left to dry.
- Any bedding such as wood shavings should be double bagged and put into general waste
- Fully clean and disinfect all relevant parts of the vehicle used to transport the animal. This will include the inside of the vehicle (e.g. steering wheel, gear stick etc), the animal travel area and some external areas (e.g. door handles) as well as keys.

Care of an animal in a rescue environment

- Focus on maintaining at least minimum legislative welfare standards for your animals. You may need to significantly amend your daily routines, including the amount of exercise or handling you can provide, to reflect your staff availability.
- All relevant protocols and care information (e.g. diet sheets) for all species should be readily available to all staff, including those who may not be as familiar as others
- Amend staff rotas to enable social distancing requirements to be met and reduce the risk of infection between staff. Consider dividing staff into multiple teams that have no contact to ensure some staff are always available.
- Maintain strong biosecurity measures. Ensure strict cleaning protocols are in place using appropriate disinfectants and animal housing and staff areas are well ventilated.
- Consider how you can enhance environmental enrichment for your animals, as a key measure to manage stress and frustration.
- If appropriate, place animals in temporary foster care until they can be rehomed.

Veterinary care of animals in a rescue environment or being rehomed

- As is normal, check all animals at the point of intake to evaluate for disease and vaccination requirements. Isolate or quarantine animals as required.
- Veterinary practices may be able to offer general health checks and vaccination if a disease and public health assessment by the vet shows it to be appropriate and social distancing can be maintained. The establishment's veterinary practice should be contacted as the risk of a visit by a vet and veterinary nurse may be less of a public health risk than individual animals being taken to the practice.

- In view of the possible non-availability of primary vaccination, biosecurity should be enhanced with increased use of hand gels and/or hand washing between dealing with each animal.
- Take care when rehoming un-neutered animals to homes with an existing animal in particular where there are unneutered, sexually mature or mixed sex animals. Neutering may be possible if a risk assessment of the public health and animal welfare implications by the vet shows it to be appropriate.
- It may not be appropriate to re-home to households with existing animals as there will be no opportunity to ensure compatibility by meeting on neutral ground.
- Explore the use of telemedicine and remote prescribing if a site visit from your vet isn't possible.
- If a vet considers a visit is essential, plan this carefully to meet social distancing requirements.
- When rehoming, accurately record any outstanding vet procedures including vaccinations for each animal, with a process for follow up.
- Check with your insurance partner about requirements for veterinary care prior to rehoming in order to validate insurance cover notes.
- Contact other local rescues if your usual veterinary practice is not available to support you.
- Animals with ongoing complex veterinary issues should not generally be considered for rehoming.
- Consider your policy on euthanasia with your vet. This may need to be reviewed in line with your ability to manage animals on site, the intake demand you may face and the availability of veterinary support.
- Refer to the latest [RCVS](#), [BVA](#), [BSAVA](#) and [BEVA](#) guidance during the Coronavirus pandemic. The vets of the major organisations have provided further guidance that can be found [here](#).

Rehoming – covering the rehoming/adoption of animals from centres or directly from one home to another and including the temporary placement of animals in the care of a home (also known as fostering)

- The public cannot visit rescue centres to rehome an animal since this does not constitute essential travel. You or a licensed transporter should deliver all animals to their new homes.
- Prioritise local rehoming opportunities to avoid long journeys where possible.
- Centre staff, volunteers or licensed transporters engaged to deliver an animal should be easily identifiable with letters of authority and in uniform if provided.
- Ensure there will be no physical contact between the new owner/foster carer and your staff, prior to transfer of the animal. Consider introducing an animal to a potential new owner or foster carers using video calling facilities or equivalent. Use the CFSG handover [protocol](#).
- Plan ahead with the animal's new owner or foster carer. Agree how to carry out the delivery safely. Book the appointment date and time. Deliver the animal in a secure way and which allows for the new owner to meet the animal, whilst maintaining at least a two-metre distance between staff and the new owner/s. Minimise any time spent in the owner's home. Use the CFSG handover [protocol](#).
- Do not rehome an animal to a household in which one or more member is displaying symptoms of or has tested positive for Coronavirus – this will need to be verified with the household.
- Rehome animals only when the new owner/s can meet your suitability criteria and where the welfare needs of the animal will be met, including when the new owner/s return to their usual lifestyle or in the unfortunate event of the new owner becoming ill. The physical suitability of a home can be assessed using [Google Earth](#) and virtual tours like [WhatsApp](#), [Zoom](#) and photos or videos of the setup at home.
- New owners need to have purchased everything they will need in terms of equipment for the animal and a reasonable supply of food and bedding (e.g. to cover a period of at least 14 days if they need to isolate themselves) before they get an animal.
- Keep in touch with the new owner/s and consider carrying out a post-rehoming home visit once the situation returns to normal and travel restrictions are lifted.
- If appropriate, consider short-term fostering as a means of ensuring the suitability of the match between an animal and its new owner/s prior to rehoming.
- Consider the impact of Government restrictions on your rehoming criteria. For example, all homes for dogs should have outside space to allow exercise if dog walking is not a permitted activity.
- In the event of an unsuccessful rehoming or foster the animal will need to be collected and returned to the rescue centre, in accordance with the Admissions guidance, above.
- Ensure that new owners/fosterers can access emergency veterinary care while Government restrictions are in place.

SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION, ADVICE AND SUPPORT

- [Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs advice on Coronavirus](#)
- [Scottish Government Advice on Coronavirus](#)
- [Welsh Government Advice on Coronavirus](#)
- [Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs on Coronavirus](#)
- **Major animal rescue organisations** – many offering further advice on animal care during the Coronavirus pandemic
- **Membership bodies and sector groups offering advice and support for owners and pet businesses, including:**
- [Canine and Feline Sector Group \(CFSG\)](#)
Provides a range of advice for pet owners, including those struggling with the cost of veterinary care.
- [Association of Dogs and Cats Homes](#)
Provides [Minimum Welfare and Operational Standards](#) for dog and cat rescue organisations, a range of [advice](#) on working during the Coronavirus pandemic and a [directory of member organisations](#) across the British Isles.
- [National Equine Welfare Council](#)
Provides a range of Coronavirus guidance and a [directory of members](#) by region.
- [Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Knowledge](#)
Provides clinical evidence, advice for professionals and employers, and infection control resources related to Coronavirus
- [British Veterinary Association](#)
Provides guidance for veterinary practices in assessing emergency and urgent care during the Coronavirus pandemic