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Veterinary visits in the time of COVID-19

By Mona S. Miller, DVM



Dr. Mona Miller lives in Lafayette with her son, two cats and yellow Labrador. She attended UC Berkeley as an undergraduate, and received her DVM from UC Davis. She has been happy to call Lafayette home since 2001. She can be reached via email at MonaSDVM@aol.com. She welcomes questions from readers that may get incorporated into a column.

Public Health issued a statement in March that encourages rabies vaccination of pets as an essential service, recognizing that veterinarians provide an important role in zoonotic disease prevention.

Check in with your veterinarian if you are unsure whether your pet needs an examination at this time. If so, plan ahead for less urgent situations - consider making an appointment for 1-2 weeks from now. Allow your vet to keep some openings in the schedule for urgent matters that require same-day examinations.

Veterinary hospitals are following "social distancing" and safety measures to help prevent transmission of COVID-19, and have implemented new protocols to allow vet services to continue. These measures help protect the pet owners, as well as veterinary staff, and keep the physical interactions to a time limit and physical distance. Of course, veterinary staff are wearing masks at all times and gloves (or washing hands numerous times during the day).

Owners are asked to wear masks, bring their cell phones, limit the number of people in attendance (and in the car) with the pet, and to not bring their pet if owners are experiencing illness. Most pets are being transferred to a nurse in the parking lot or reception area, brought to the treatment room for exam and procedures, and veterinarians are doing primary communication by phone.

Pet owners are being asked to wait in the car, keeping a cell phone line open in order to talk with the veterinarian. Payment is being handled over the phone, and receipts/care instructions are being emailed, in an effort to limit physical paper contact.

If you have any questions at all about how your own veterinarian is handling exams, vaccines, medication refills, protocols he/she is asking of clients, please take a moment to ask the receptionist for these details when you make your appointment. In some cases, emails are being sent ahead of the appointment for you to provide information so that the flow of the appointment can be smoother. If this is the case, please take a few minutes ahead of the appointment to thoroughly complete these questionnaires so that the veterinarian has this information prior to the appointment.

My top list of advice for pet owners during these times:

In October 2019, I wrote an article for this publication that in hindsight, I should have written for this month: [Lamorinda Weekly, https:// www.lamorindaweekly.com/](https://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue1316/How-to-get-the-most-from-veterinary-visits.html)

[archive/issue1316/How-to-get-the-most-from-veterinary-visits.html](https://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue1316/How-to-get-the-most-from-veterinary-visits.html). It is even more true in these surreal COVID-19 times to "be prepared."

It is well worth another read of this article at this time, in order to maximize the effectiveness of your veterinary visit. However, I'd like to now add in the components of "be patient" and "be kind."

Veterinary services have been deemed essential from the start of COVID-19 shelter-in-place policies, and so veterinary hospitals have continued to remain open for business during these past two months. However, there have been some significant changes to methods and protocols of operating in the time of COVID-19.

To start, there is a wide net of definition for what is "essential" veterinary care. Guidelines have been provided to veterinarians by both the California and American Veterinary Medical Associations, but ultimately it has been left to the discretion of each hospital to define what services they provide.

Some hospitals have narrowed the definition to urgent or emergency unexpected illness or injury, providing this level of service only. Other hospitals have kept the definition wide, including traditional wellness care, such as vaccinations and elective surgeries (spays and neuter, routine anesthetic dental cleanings and evaluations) in the services provided. The California Department of

1. If you need medications refilled, give your vet plenty of time to get requests processed. Everything is taking longer nowadays, including shipping from online pharmacies. To avoid running out of meds, start the request process 1-2 weeks ahead of time.
2. For in-hospital exams, adhere to safety protocols - wear a mask, limit the number of people in the car, and do not bring your pet if you have been experiencing signs of illness yourself. Wipe down dog and cat carrier handles with bleach, Clorox or Lysol.
3. For in-hospital exams, be thoughtful regarding efficient verbal communication. Bring a charged cellphone and leave the line open for communication with the vet. If you are a note-taker, bring a pen and paper to take notes during the phone call. Please do not schedule a work conference call during a vet exam.
4. Be patient - this whole process adds 10-20 minutes onto the expected appointment time, much like going to the grocery store takes longer nowadays. The veterinary staff is working hard to make the flow as smooth as possible, with limitations of one-person-at-a-time in the lobby area and back-and-forth communication between vet and client.
5. And as Ellen Degeneres says, "Be kind to one another." Most veterinary staff have not experienced staying at home. In the two hospitals in which I work, the days are just as long and fraught with emotional expenditure, and there is now an added stress component of increased risk of exposure to COVID-19, and less "childcare" in the form of school attendance. Please recognize that veterinary personnel are second-line health care providers in this fight against this virus, in the same vein as grocery workers.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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