



Mississippi Board of Animal Health

James A. Watson, D.V.M.
State Veterinarian

DATE: April 04, 2020
TO: Mississippi Veterinarians
FROM: Jim Watson, DVM
RE: COVID-19 Issues and Essential Service Guidance for Veterinary Practices

Our sincere hope is that you and your families are healthy and managing these unusual circumstances with as little difficulty as possible. Like most of you, our employees are working tirelessly in this incident to both respond to the COVID-19 situation and continue regular operations as much as possible. We are here to assist you in any way we can, and we know that we will be able to get through this together.

This memo is in response to questions we are receiving at our office from veterinarians, shelters, and animal transport entities. It is our intention to be clear and concise regarding interpretation of the Executive Orders that have been issued by the Governor and how they affect animal-related businesses in Mississippi. However, please realize that new information is coming out almost daily and that as things change we will do our best to update you as information is released that may affect your livelihood.

Essential Business

The following statement was previously sent out by the MVMA and is stated here again for consistency. Veterinary Clinics are considered essential services, and as such can provide animals with essential veterinary care as needed. Veterinary clinics are responsible for enacting protocols to limit the potential exposure and spread of Covid-19 among their staff and clients while preserving critical supplies and equipment. Elective and routine procedures and services should be delayed. This will conserve the use of PPE, as well as limit the number of people leaving their homes.

Essential vs. Non-essential Services

If the owned or unowned (shelter/humane organization animals/strays) need essential services of a veterinarian, the animals may receive veterinary care. Non-essential services, such as spays, neuters, routine vaccinations, and writing health certificates for animal transports should be put on hold until the shelter-in-place order has been lifted. Rabies vaccinations may be considered essential or non-essential depending on the circumstances. For instance, an owned animal that has regularly received rabies vaccination can be deferred for rabies vaccination until the shelter-in-place order has been lifted. Animals that need current rabies vaccination in order to go with its family to another state will need to receive rabies vaccination. Keep in mind that in all circumstances in which services are to be rendered, the primary concern is for the safety of your staff, the public, and then the animal.

COVID-19 is a greater risk to you and the public at this time than is rabies. Another example is if when a dog should get Bordetella vaccine. They should be deferred if it is for routine vaccination; it should be given if the animal must be boarded because the family cannot care for the animal because they are ill.

Shelters, Humane Organizations, and Zoos

Shelters, humane organizations, zoos, and animal transports are not considered as providing essential services. Therefore, they should not be open for business but should be sheltering-in-place until April 20, 2020. However, the animals at the shelters and humane organizations will require care and the employees of these facilities may go to and from the facilities to take care of the animals. They have been advised stop routine intake unless they are associated with a government agency or if a person is ill and cannot take care of their animal and so must surrender it. The workers at these facilities may still need essential services of the veterinary community in order to take care of the animals. This is allowable as long as all the parameters for human protection from COVID-19 are followed as much as possible. The shelters have been advised that veterinarians should not write health certificates for transport until the movement restrictions under the Executive Orders have been lifted.

Please continue to let us know your questions and concerns. We will do our best to provide answers as things evolve and change. We can be reached at msstatevet@mdac.ms.gov or at 601-359-1170 or toll-free at (888) 646-8731.