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New York State Veterinary Medical Society

## Covid19 updates - 3/22/2020

Here is a summary of what we are hearing from veterinarians across NY State to help you with your decision making.

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### Should I stay open?

For most of this week Animal Hospitals were mostly making decisions on their operations based on their (or our lawyer's) interpretation of the Governor's Executive Orders.

We are seeing a shift in that thinking, as members take in the [horrific news from Italy](#) and the terrifying surge in [hospitalizations in New York City](#). Many are beginning to realize that even with curb-side pickup measures, animal hospitals are a place where people work together and can infect each other. The rise in hospitalizations confirms that people can take days to weeks to show symptoms, and are meanwhile infecting their co-workers.

However some veterinarians who are more remote from New York City are wondering whether the Governor's closure orders for non-essential businesses are based on the situation in the city, and therefore an overkill for their rural practice. Clearly nobody wants to jeopardize their business unnecessarily, and you can certainly find scientists who argue that the current blanket approach is suboptimal and that a more targeted approach is needed. However when I look at the news reports from Italy I think that a lot of Italians must have thought that they could mix with others and may now be bitterly regretting it.

When members ask me directly, I have advised caution, but we don't have time right now to develop an official NYSVMS position that could be obsolete by tomorrow. So I am going to give you my opinion based on all the people I am in touch with and my access to information.

I sense that behind member's questions there is often a longing for an answer that will guide them through the next weeks. That makes sense, we would all like the comfort of finding a stable and secure place in the midst of a storm.

My personal responses to those who ask is that the situation is changing so rapidly that there is likely to be far more information becoming available during the next week. But today it may be more important to focus on what decisions you make about today and tomorrow, and put off any longer term planning.

Today there are animals who are going to suffer or die unless you help them. Even if there are no Covid19 cases within 50 miles of you, there is a risk that is not yet fully understood that when you provide that care you may infect yourself or others. It is up to how you balance that risk against which cases you accept into your hospital today.

If you are a food animal veterinarian, we are all indebted to your bravery. There is far less opportunity for you to reduce services without jeopardizing our food supply, and this is reflected in the [guidelines of exempt businesses from the Department of Agriculture and Markets](#). Stay safe, and thank you and the farmers!

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## How do I best provide emergency services?

I am hearing of some great projects from our members to provide emergency services in the most efficient and safe way possible. For example, some general practices are closing and staff transferring to their local emergency hospital so that the emergency hospital can provide 24 hour service.

Other options might be for nearby animal hospitals to alternate opening days for emergency admissions only. Or just all work in shifts out of a single facility.

We would love to help with the process of coordination, but I would need input from veterinarians in the field. I have the capacity to build collaborative applications within hours, so if anyone has thoughts about online systems that would help, please let me know.

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## What about rabies etc;

Earlier I talked about focusing on keeping people safe today while providing care for animals who need you today. Tomorrow is a long-time away in the life-cycle of Covid19 in the US epicenter that is New York today. Obviously delaying inoculations for too long could be tragic, and nobody is suggesting that as a possibility. But there is no official answer to this question today, and in a crisis like this we invite chaos (and penalties!) if we stop following our State government's leadership. I would not recommend admitting patients today for routine inoculations.

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## I've worked 20 years to build this business. I don't want to lose it.

Yes, this is terrifying. And there is more bad news than good right now. Governor Cuomo's message is to stay alive today so you are able to rebuild your business later.

Your revenue over the next few days is probably going down. After that? We are going to start receiving better information about how the disease really spreads and how best to handle and prioritize animals who need inoculations, dentistry and a thousand other medical treatments. These animals aren't going anywhere, so unlike many industries, you know that the need for veterinarians and technicians and experienced hospital staff will still be here. You are going to be needed, healthy and alive.

Of course you should be protecting your business. But maximizing revenue today might not be the optimal strategy. It could be more effective to talk to every lender and supplier to delay outgoings. Lenders and mortgage holders are relaxing payment terms, and you may even hear from them first offering interest free delays for your monthly payments.

What about payroll. The more solidarity you can show your staff, the more they will stand by you through the recovery. Make sure they get the news that their mortgage payments and student loan payments are also going to be frozen for a while. Maybe see if you can figure out how to work together so that reduced working hours are balanced by delayed mortgage and student debt repayments.

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## How long with this go on for?

Short answer - a very long time.

If you have some spare time, I have attached a very interesting paper from [Imperial College London](#) that explains the mathematics.

The Imperial College model's conclusion is that initially we need two or three months of essential services only. If these measures work we may be able to balance the peak demand for intensive care treatment with the available capacity.

After those first two or three months of "emergency services only" there could be a period of more normal activity. But during that period there will continue to be viral transmission through the population until the demand on medical resources once again reaches a threshold that triggers another shutdown. This cycle would repeat itself until enough of the population has had the virus and survived to diminish the speed of transmission to balance the medical resources longer term.

Of course if a vaccine is available in a year or so, the whole cycle stops and we can avoid further lockdowns.

That is of course just one model from one set of researchers, however it is consistent with the general view that we are looking at a year or more where Covid19 dominates our world.

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# What's the good news?

The good news for New York Veterinarians, Technicians and others critical to in the veterinary industry is that we live in a country with a great system of government and a robust financial infrastructure. We went into this crisis during one of the strongest periods of economic activity the nation has seen in decades, so we have a long way to fall. The US Treasury and banking system appear to have the capacity to extend loan deadlines, to finance new loans and to successfully restart the economy.

We will mourn family and friends, and as survivors we will honor their memory by ensuring our world is better than before in the way we care for each other and our animals.

As a profession, veterinarians are called upon today to risk their lives to serve both animals and the health of the public. I am proud to be able to serve your profession in New York State to help you in any way I can.

Just let me know of anything that Stephanie, Sara, Star, Kaleena and I can do to help you fulfill your veterinary oath. It is an honor for us to be of assistance to you.

Just call me or email me any time for anything you need.

Best regards,

Tim

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