

# VETFLASH!

## COVID-19

### Practice Guidelines

The South African Veterinary Association (SAVA) would like to inform veterinarians of **suggested** practice guidelines in this period until the COVID-19 virus subsides to a point where it no longer poses a threat to public and personal health. Be reminded that these are general recommendations but that each practice and veterinarian's situation is unique and that thus adjustments may need to be made.

South African veterinarians are acutely aware of the policies of social distancing and will be updated regularly by SAVA on recommended practice guidelines to implement in their veterinary practices.

### SAVA's recommendations to veterinarians are:

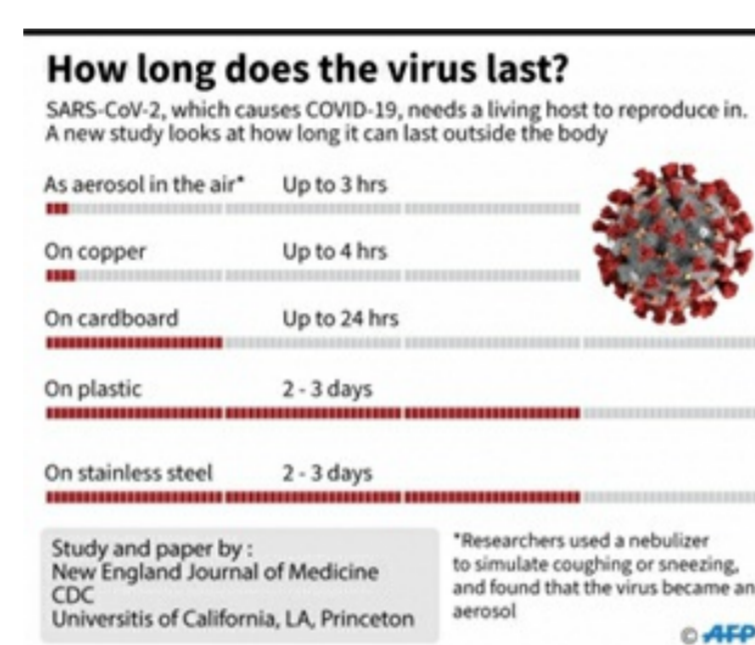
- Work strictly on appointment. When appointments are made, consider asking the following questions of clients:
  - Have they been in contact with a confirmed or suspected Covid-19 case?
  - Have they returned from travelling to countries considered as risky? Use this link from the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention as a guideline as it is continuously updated: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/map-and-travel-notice.html>
  - Are they experiencing any current symptoms of respiratory tract infections?
  - Keep a record of the above, with client names and contact details (Example attached). SAVA encourages staff of veterinary practices to also complete this register daily.
- Consultations should be limited to one client accompanying a maximum of two animals.
- If possible, a distance of 2 meters should be maintained between client and practice staff. Calm animals can be handed over to practice staff outside of the practice and returned after examination and possible treatment.
- Limit consultations to critical/emergency consultations.
  - In the event that a client arrives in an emergency situation while you are busy with a consultation, tend to the emergency as you would have normally done. Ensure that contacts between clients are limited.
- Postpone elective procedures. At present, sterilisations should not be viewed as elective procedures and should continue under the discretion of the veterinarian. This is to avoid a substantial increase of animals coming into season with the associated adverse consequences.
- The veterinarian may insist on a telephonic screening process but would in most cases not make a diagnosis or prescribe medicine without a consultation.
- House calls for companion animals should be avoided as far as possible. The animal owner should firstly attempt to use family/friends to transport animals to the practice. It will remain the prerogative of the veterinarian to do house calls in extreme circumstances.
- We advise that, even though veterinarians should work by appointment only, clients do not wait in the waiting room. Clients should announce their visit to the receptionist but then remain outside until called for the appointment.
- Veterinarians should request all clients to use a hand sanitizer prior to entering the practice.
- There is no existing proof that domestic animals can transmit Covid-19 to humans.
- Larger practices may consider breaking up the practice in teams of two or more, working at different times. This may assist in preventing staff and owners of a practice being infected completely – should a person from one team be diagnosed positive for Covid-19, the affected team could be quarantined without having to close the practice.

### SAVA's recommendations to veterinarians who visit client premises are:

- All recommended precautions with regard to social distancing should be applied, i.e. hand sanitizing before and after a visit, maintaining a distance of 2 meters from the client(s). As far as possible, these consultations must take place outdoors.
- It is recommended that routine procedures and inspections be postponed to the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, or at the discretion of the veterinarian.
- It is recommended that food and medicine be collected by appointment only.

It is impossible to describe all possible situations. Be advised that veterinarians are trained in infection control and will evaluate each situation on a case-by-case basis. The veterinarian will determine the best course of action.

The graphic below, as published in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#) on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 highlights the period the virus can exist outside the body.



The above highlights the need for adequate and regular disinfection procedures.

### Conclusion

The above are recommendations for your guidance to be applied in each veterinary practice's unique context. SAVA will continue to survey the domestic and international landscape and inform you of any further suggestions. This document is directed at the veterinary industry of South Africa and you may distribute it amongst your colleagues that are not SAVA members. SAVA would like to request that you refrain from making this available on forums for the general public (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) and from making public comments on this document – society is currently operating at a high level of alarm and we must ensure that we do not add to the highly charged emotional state.

SAVA would welcome further suggestions and insights that you may have implemented in your practice that could be useful for your colleagues.

**We have been inundated by members requesting information and updates. We will attempt to limit the number of emails that we send. When you receive a VetFlash from SAVA, accept that we have deemed it relevant and urgent for our membership base.**

Kind regards,  
Gert Steyn  
SAVA: Managing Director

