

VETFLASH!

Dear SAVA Member,

In this VetFlash, we include communication we have received from Dr Mike Modisane, Chief Veterinary Officer, from the Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD). We also include an attachment of the announcement by the Honourable Minister Didiza earlier today.

Further, the current VetFlash is aligned to discussions between SAVA & SAVC to ensure that information is not contradicting.

From the communication we have received, it is safe to conclude that

- veterinary services are essential services to ensure
 - food safety
 - animal welfare.

The lockdown instructions as delivered by Honourable President Ramaphosa is clear in its intentions

- we need to slow down the spread of COVID-19
- if we don't achieve this now, the ramifications will be dramatic in the short and long term to every South African.

As South Africans, we have a duty to assist government in its efforts to curtail the spread of COVID-19 and to help "flattening the curve".

This places every veterinarian in a quandary, since every potential consultation or procedure requires a veterinarian to critically appraise the outcome of the case as either essential veterinary services, or duty and obligation to South Africa. There is unlikely to be a guideline or a manual that will be able to deal with every possible situation. Our professional appraisal of the situation will be called upon to take a decision for every single case.

We know that the security cluster (justice, police, transport and defence ministries) will provide further instructions tomorrow. We will inform you as soon as we receive it.

We are in continuous discussion with DALRRD and SAVC to obtain clarity on a number of issues and will inform you continuously as solid information becomes available. Core points where we need to obtain clarity are:

- What do veterinarians and their staff need to carry on them to confirm that their driving/walking/being transported is for an essential business and that the person is not in conflict with the lock down?
- What do clients need as proof that they are on their way to a veterinary practice with an animal patient to obtain an essential service?
- What will our pharmaceutical suppliers and the couriers need as proof that they are supplying an essential and necessary veterinary service?

Letter from Dr Mike Modisane to SAVA & SAVC as a response to our common query to DALRRD

We take note of the well prepared motivation and understand very well the arguments on declaring veterinary services an essential service. If possible, we should try to impart on the veterinary profession that the COVID-19 situation could be a disaster of unprecedented proportions. One person getting sick from the disease is one person too many. From that single person hundreds more people could be subsequently infected and with deaths especially taking South Africa's economic situation into consideration. It is therefore important that the profession demonstrates its worth to the rest of the country and the world by being responsible and helping by ensuring that there are no complications resulting from the COVID-19 lock down. Complications include deteriorating animal health and welfare situation. We should as a profession try to keep our standards high but avoid contributing negatively to the efforts of the Department of Health to flatten the COVID-19 curve. We should still be able to provide essential veterinary and welfare care.

The President is trying as much as possible to avoid a situation where the medical profession has to make life or death decisions. The advice that I can give is that "if it is not essential, it can be done later". If a service is not essential, the provider of that service should stay at home. Where necessary, the service providers must use only skeleton staff. Please, if staff is not essential, they must stay home. Veterinarians should not leave their homes solely to perform elective, cosmetic surgeries and or spays unless medically indicated. In our discussions, we also touched a bit on services that could make the COVID situation worse. Disposal of veterinary waste and carcasses in veterinary hospitals for instance, is absolutely necessary to avoid a stench building up in residential areas as an example unless the waste and carcasses can be safeguarded appropriately.

The police will be patrolling the streets, with the assistance of the army. If anyone is caught out there, the police will wish to be provided with reasons. We will not be able to defend unless we can prove that it fits in with the criteria of essential.

It is impossible to cover everything, but our profession has always been very responsible and understands the epidemiological and economic repercussions of our actions.

Please familiarize yourselves with the announcement of the Minister.

Dr Mike Modisane
Chief Veterinary Officer
DALRRD

Announcement of the Minister here:

<https://www.gov.za/speeches/minister-thoko-didiza-message-agriculture-and-food-sector-south-africa-coronavirus-24-mar>

Kind regards,
Gert Steyn
SAVA: Managing Director

