



## TENNESSEE VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

### Message from the President

Colleagues and Friends,

TVMA is providing the following email update of the current situation regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects on veterinarians, their practices, staff and clients.

I want to assure you that your organization is working tirelessly on behalf of veterinarians in our state. The situation is ever changing. So much that we had to re-write the email section regarding essential services as Governor Lee's order came down Monday afternoon.

We have been and will remain in close contact with the TN Department of Health, the Department of Agriculture and the Governor's office to assure that veterinary practices will continue to operate and be able to provide the necessary services and medical care to our patients.

I ask that every veterinarian does their part by limiting contact with the public and by conserving and donating PPE when you can. The Governor's office has asked me to stress the importance of veterinary PPE conservation by delaying any elective procedure that would not threaten the health of the animal. I personally request that you donate any excess stock of PPE that you can spare to help protect our physician and nurse counterparts in their fight against this disease. It is our duty as veterinarians to help.

Remember we are stronger together!

Matt Povlovich, DVM  
TVMA, President

## UPDATE

### TVMA and Member Concerns During the COVID-19 Pandemic

As the situation continues to evolve with the COVID-19 pandemic and new information becomes available, TVMA continues its commitment to providing our members with information and guidance. It is incumbent on each veterinarian and veterinary technician to keep abreast of what is a rapidly changing situation and to use his or her best professional judgement in regards to making decisions that are in the best interest of public health, the profession, the patients and public that we serve, our staff members and families, and our practices.

During what is an unprecedented event in our lifetimes, it is also equally important to protect your personal health, both physical and mental. Below is information regarding services provided by MYgroup, TVMA's Membership Assistance Program. Remember these are free services to members.

### Essential Businesses

On March 30th, Governor Lee issued [Executive Order #22](#). This order directs all Tennessee residents to stay at home unless engaging in an essential activity. The essential activities are listed in Attachment A to the order and include "veterinary care and all health care services provided to animals." Also included are "businesses that provide food, shelter, and other necessities of life for animals, including animal shelters, rescues,...kennels, and adoption facilities." Many municipalities have already been operating under their own local stay at home order and essential business exemption, but the Governor's new order extends this to all Tennesseans.

We encourage all veterinary clinics to reduce personnel to the minimum number of staff which is necessary to provide essential services for the animals we serve. It is also wise to devise an intra-clinic staff separation plan for those that own or work in larger veterinary clinics so as to minimize staff contact with one another.

### Services Considered Essential

We have also been asked about what a veterinary practice that is operating as an essential business is allowed to do. The short answer is that there is no clear guidance from the state or local officials. Again, we are being asked to use our best professional judgement to decide what services to offer our clients at this time. This may vary based on locality, the degree of infection in your region, and the availability of other services in your area. Here are some guidelines you might consider in developing a plan for your practice. My thanks to our colleagues in New York who have shared this information with us. As you know, the outbreak in New York is significantly larger and has been going on longer than in Tennessee.

In order to assist veterinarians in determining the necessity of a procedure or service, here are some of the questions you should ask yourself:

- Should I choose to defer or delay the performance of this service, will my patient suffer, experience unjustifiable pain, experience a worsening of a condition that might make future treatment more difficult or even impossible, or could my patient die?
- Does rendering this service support another essential business, function, or provider? For example, would boarding a dog allow a human health care provider the ability to go to work for an extended period of time or work overtime shifts?
- Is the service being rendered supporting the public health?
- Is the service curbing the spread of infectious diseases in the companion animal population and protecting the health and welfare of livestock and the food supply chain?
- Currently, the legal requirements regarding rabies vaccinations remain in place, but could other vaccinations be delayed or deferred to facilitate social distancing?

### Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

As we are all aware, front line health care providers are facing a critical shortage of these much-needed supplies. Traditionally, because there is very little risk to veterinary staff of exposure to pathogens from our patients, veterinarians have not usually stocked large supplies of PPE like N95 masks, face shields, Tyvek suits, barrier gowns, and goggles. However, Executive Order 18 from Gov. Lee has ordered human oral health care providers, hospitals, and outpatient surgical facilities to stop performing non-essential procedures and has requested (but stopped short of requiring) these providers to turn over their PPE that is not required to provide emergency care to the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency (TEMA). The dental community has been widely praised by the governor for their support of this initiative.

While TVMA has been informed by the General Counsel of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, that Executive Order 18 does not apply to veterinarians, it is possible that some veterinarians may have the ability and desire to share their excess supplies of PPE with our human colleagues. I can proudly say that our own TVMA President, Dr. Matt Povlovich, and his partners at Tennessee Equine Hospital have already donated 300 surgical masks to our human colleagues.

### Donating PPE

The Tennessee Dental Association has set up a program to facilitate the transfer of needed PPE to the front-line health care providers.

Here's a list of the priority items in the fight against COVID-19:

- Masks, especially N95
- Gloves
- Face shields
- Barrier gowns
- Goggles
- Hand sanitizer
- Cleaning wipes
- Tyvek suits
- Thermometers

Here's how the TDA program works: if you have extra supplies based on the list above, please fill out the form below with a list of the supplies you are willing to donate to local hospitals. After you hit submit, you will be redirected to a new page that give you details on drop-off locations and/or shipping options.

<https://form.jotform.com/200835741133044>

You can also find more information at the TDA website: <https://www.smiletennessee.org/>

### Telemedicine

Questions have been asked about the role of telehealth and telemedicine in our profession. Recently, the FDA relaxed their enforcement of the veterinary-client-patient-relationship requirements in regards to telemedicine and telehealth.

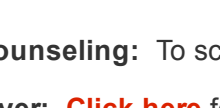
Based on our most recent discussions with the state, all statutes and rules for the state of Tennessee remain in effect and are enforceable unless specifically changed by Executive Order. While Executive Order 20 has relaxed the telehealth requirements regarding a doctor-patient relationship for human health care providers, it is not applicable to veterinary medicine. Therefore, in order to practice telehealth in the state of Tennessee, a valid VCPR is still required. For a definition of the VCPR, please [see TCA 63-12-103\(17\)](#). In addition, a prerequisite to prescribing is the existence of a VCPR ([see Rule 1730-01-.21 \(3\)\(a\)](#)).

The bottom line is that you can provide telehealth to your patients during this pandemic, but you must still follow the laws approved by the legislature and the rules established by the Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners. Should this change by Executive Order, TVMA will follow up with additional information.

### Continuing Education Requirements

Some questions have arisen concerning the requirement for continuing education. Obviously, under the current situation, large veterinary medical conferences like the AVMA Annual Convention and others may or may not take place later in the year. Executive Order 20 did relax the requirements regarding CE for reinstatement of a license, but it does not appear to relax the requirements for continuing education as it pertains to the regular maintenance of a license. At the present time, it appears that veterinarians and veterinary technicians will be required to obtain their required hours as usual and that the requirement for no more than 10 of those hours to be in a multi-media format (online, digital, virtual, etc.) remains in effect. Of course, this issue is also fluid and could be subject to change as the year progresses. It is unlikely that human health care providers might be pulled off the front lines of dealing with a pandemic to be forced to attend a medical conference to obtain CE, but we will all have to wait to see what the state decides.

Two other points that are relevant in regards to CE. Within the Veterinary Practice Act, [TCA 63-12-120\(b\)](#) states, "The board, in its discretion, may waive the annual continuing education requirements for good cause shown." In addition, for licensees impacted by any circumstance that prevents them from obtaining their required hours, [Rule 1730-01-.12\(4\)](#) gives the Board the power to grant a waiver or an extension of the required hours. The request does have to be submitted in writing and a licensee that is contemplating such a request is strongly advised to review the pertinent rule and talk with the Board's administrative staff to ensure that all procedures are correctly followed.



There are several resources available to you through McLaughlin Young's EAP and Work-Life Services:

**Counseling:** To schedule an appointment to speak with a clinician, call 1-800-633-3353.

**Flyer:** [Click here](#) for a new flyer Stay Calm & Reduce Fear during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

**Online Seminar:** Starting Saturday, March 21st, Keep Calm and Carry-on – Maintaining Your Composure Amidst the Pandemic Panic will be available at [mygroup.com](http://mygroup.com) through the Work-Life Portal.

**Online Resources:** There are resources about COVID-19 available now through the Work-Life Portal at [mygroup.com](http://mygroup.com). New resources are being added on a regular basis.

[Click here](#) to read more about the new resources that have been added.

To access the MYgroup resources login with the username: **TVMA** and password: **guest**.

### Stay safe.

TVMA Board & Staff

Tennessee Veterinary Medical Association, PO Box 803, Fayetteville, TN 37334  
931/438-0070, [tennesseevma@gmail.com](mailto:tennesseevma@gmail.com), [www.tvmanet.com](http://www.tvmanet.com)

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