

## Physical (Social) Distancing and Your Pet During the COVID-19 Pandemic

### What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a human respiratory disease that was initially discovered late in 2019. This disease is caused by a new coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, that has not previously been identified in humans.

Coronaviruses are a family of viruses that cause a variety of diseases. The common cold in humans is caused by a type of coronavirus. Different coronaviruses also cause clinical signs in animals, including diarrhea in dogs and feline infectious peritonitis (FIP) in cats.



It is important to understand, however, that while all coronaviruses are related, they are *not* the same virus. For example, SARS-CoV-2 cannot cause canine coronavirus infection, and vice versa.

### What is physical distancing?

Physical distancing, or social distancing as it was initially termed, is one of the most effective strategies available to reduce the spread of COVID-19. When people are in close contact, it is easy for a viral infection to spread between them. When there is more distance between people, it is more difficult for a virus to spread. Physical distancing is the act of intentionally creating distance between people, in order to slow the spread of disease.

Physical distancing includes the following principles:

- Stay home as much as possible
- Avoid crowds
- Limit errands
- Postpone social gatherings or get together "virtually"
- Work from home
- Stay 6 feet (2 meters) away from others when in public

By limiting close personal contact, it becomes more difficult for the virus to spread from person to person. Over time, the goal is that this physical distancing will slow the spread of COVID-19.

## What are the effects of physical distancing on pets?

For the most part, this should be an enjoyable time for your pets. Many of our pets are home alone all day while we are at work or engaged in other activities. During this time of physical distancing, you are likely spending more time at home than usual. As long as you are not feeling sick, take advantage of this time to enjoy some extra cuddles and playtime with your pets.

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It is healthy to spend time outdoors while physical distancing, as long as you are feeling well and can remain at least 6 feet away from other people. Avoid crowded areas like dog parks and busy trails, but quiet neighborhood streets and less-popular trails can give you an excellent opportunity to get outside to a long walk with your dog. Fresh air and exercise will likely alleviate some of the stress and anxiety that you may be feeling, while giving your dog some fun and exercise.

If you have cats, find new ways to play with them indoors. There are many different types of cat toys available (many of which can be ordered online, allowing you to avoid a shopping trip), but cardboard boxes and balled-up paper that you likely already have at home can also provide a source of entertainment for both you and your cat.

## If I have multiple pets, or different types of pets, should I keep them separate?

At this time, there is no evidence that naturally infected pets can spread the virus to another animal, whether that be dog to dog, cat to cat, or between different species of pets (dog to cat for example), OR to people. Therefore, at this time there is no need to keep pets separated from each other. Taking your pet to a boarding facility or veterinary clinic is also okay, as long as you avoid close contact with employees and other clients by using physical distancing procedures. Call ahead to find out what the new procedures are.

## How do I protect my pets if I get sick?

If you have been diagnosed with COVID-19, public health officials recommend that you restrict contact with pets as a precaution until more information is known about the virus. If possible, have another member of your household care for your pet.

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If you must provide care for your pet yourself, follow the recommendations published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water for 20 seconds before and after any interaction with your pets, after coughing, sneezing, blowing your nose, or touching your face; avoid close contact with your pet (snuggling, kissing, or sleeping with your pet); wear a mask—even a cloth mask—to help decrease droplet spread when coughing or sneezing; and clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces.

If you are not ill with COVID-19, you may interact with your pet as you normally would, including walking them on a leash, feeding them, and playing with them.

## What if my pet needs veterinary care during this period of physical distancing?

Many veterinary clinics are adjusting their policies to reflect physical distancing guidelines related to COVID-19. If your pet needs veterinary care (or if you need to pick up medication, a prescription diet, etc.), **call your veterinary hospital first to determine how to proceed.** You may be asked whether you have been exposed to anyone with COVID-19 and/or whether you have had any respiratory signs or fever. Based on this information, they will determine the safest way to care for your pet.

Expect that your veterinary visit may look or feel a little different during this time period. Some practices are taking pets to the treatment area for exams and diagnostics, in order to limit the amount of time that team members and clients spend confined in exam rooms together, while other practices are offering curbside service and allowing clients to wait in their cars. Regardless of the approach used during your visit, understand that your veterinarian is doing his or her best to maximize your safety, your pet's safety, and the safety of the veterinary team.

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