



COVID-19 – ADVICE FOR ANIMAL RELATED BUSINESSES AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND

Updated 11th January 2021
(update includes revised pet grooming section)

This guidance is subject to change depending on Government advice

Introduction

This guidance has been updated in the light of the national lockdown imposed by Government on 6th January 2021 because of Coronavirus. It seeks to balance public health protection requirements and the need for businesses to keep working. There remains no evidence that pets are implicated in the transmission of Coronavirus to people and infection of the pet is rare, but that there is some risk of virus potentially being carried from person to person on pets and their belongings although scientific assessment is now that such transmission is relatively unlikely. Whilst it is rare for an animal to contract Coronavirus, they may show only mild clinical signs and recover within a few days. Limited evidence available at present suggests that Coronavirus may pass from infected humans to certain pets such as dogs, cats and ferrets following close contact. The virus does not easily pass between cats or most other pets, but this cannot be ruled out and there is evidence that it may pass between ferrets and humans based on the evidence from mink infections.

The risk of transmission between infected clients and business staff remains high and the disease status of the client, if known, will assist in risk assessment.



According to the regulations, people may leave their homes if they have a reasonable reason which includes, for animal welfare reasons, to care for or exercise their pet. Work, where you cannot reasonably work from home, is also a reasonable reason for leaving your home. Any such activity must take place in a COVID-secure manner and must not include mixing between households or household bubbles. Full guidance is on the [government website](#). A journey may therefore be reasonably necessary for these purposes, and a journey in the course of business are allowed.

The status of a household is an important element of risk assessment. Clearly contact with an infected or self-isolating household carries a higher risk than with any other. The risk to the household of vulnerable people is greater and therefore requires more precautions. As there is some possibility of the pet carrying virus between households, it is appropriate to evaluate the risk in each circumstance to minimise the public health consequences. It is inevitable that the status of a household regarding Coronavirus can change from one group to another and that the precautions suitable for the pet will change at the same time.

The simple precaution of washing hands for twenty seconds, or using hand sanitiser, as frequently as possible should now be intrinsic in every activity. Therefore, in this advice document it is assumed that hand sanitisation or washing, and social distancing, are included in all activities.

CFSG has produced a [handover protocol](#) between people walking friends' and neighbours' dogs. There is a separate [protocol](#) that should also be used when handing over dogs between a business and client.

Social distancing rules must be observed throughout every activity. People should stay 2 metres apart from anyone not in their household. If it is safe to do so, any handovers should be done outside. Risk assessments need to be undertaken to ensure the business is working in a safe way to protect members of staff and the public. The principles have been set out by government [here](#).

The government has introduced additional rules on the use of face coverings and full details of them and exemptions and other relevant information can be found [here](#). Activities to protect the welfare of animals are allowed but for any activity indoors where business owners and staff interact with clients both must wear a face covering. Whilst this is not specifically mandatory for staff, it is advisable for their protection under Health and Safety legislation and does not alter the necessity for social distancing and the use of one way systems where appropriate. Where social distancing can be maintained outdoors, the use of face coverings is not necessary although it is still advised. Hands should be washed or hand sanitiser used before putting a face covering on and after taking it off. Touching the eyes, nose, or mouth is to be avoided and used face coverings should be stored in a plastic bag until they can be washed or disposed of. Single use disposable masks should be disposed of appropriately after use. Re-useable masks should be washed and dried regularly.



In all circumstances where payment is included in a process, the use of cash should be avoided. Where possible payment should be made using a credit or debit card or by electronic banking.

You should check that your insurance company is prepared to cover you for any activity undertaken during this period.

BOARDING ESTABLISHMENTS

Boarding establishments may have low occupancy rates owing to cancelled holidays, however there remains a requirement to care for the pets of people hospitalised from Coronavirus and for key workers, and vulnerable people who may not be able to care for their pets. Boarding establishments may make arrangements with shelters and rescues if needed. Pets should only be admitted or sent home by appointment to ensure you only have a single client on the premises at any one time. The [business handover protocol](#) set out by CFSG should be followed with the owner retaining all equipment such as leads. Any material such as collars, toys and food bowls arriving with an animal should be thoroughly washed with soap and water and left to dry in the open air. Handover should take place in an outdoor space large enough for the client and staff to maintain their social distance.

If an animal is taken from a Coronavirus infected household they should be held in the establishment's isolation facility for three days to ensure no virus is retained on the pet. During that period those pets should be dealt with **after** all others on the premises.

Animal rescue and re-homing organisations may also be under pressure from animals being abandoned and particularly if they have a stray dog contract with the local authority. Boarding establishments may also wish to offer space to them.

Clearly a proportion of any of those animals may not have up to date vaccinations. Veterinary practices may be able to offer vaccination if a disease and public health assessment by the vet shows it to be appropriate and social distancing can be maintained. The boarding establishment's veterinary practice should be contacted for advice regarding this. If, on assessment, the veterinary practice feels vaccination is appropriate, it may be that the risk of a visit by a vet and veterinary nurse is considered less of a public health risk than individual animals being taken to the owner's practice. It is important to increase biosecurity within the boarding establishment to reduce the likelihood of disease. This may be achieved by increased use of disinfectant, personal hygiene by the use of hand gel or hand washing between animals and by better separation of animals. Establishments should be able to provide an enhanced SOP for use in current circumstances to satisfy their local licensing authority.



HOME BOARDING

Similar to boarding establishments, it is possible that some will be little used. Priority should be given to board dogs from households of key workers, or vulnerable people or from a Coronavirus infected or isolating household. Dogs from infected or self-isolating households should not be mixed with others from non-infected households. The [business handover protocol](#) set out by CFSG should be followed.

All admission and return of dogs should be by appointment only to ensure clients are able to maintain social distance. The home boarder may collect the dog or the client may drop off and collect the dog by appointment. You should only have one person dropping off or collecting their dog at a time. The owner should retain all equipment such as leads. The home boarder must wash all equipment with soap and water once the dog/s have left. Dogs should be walked on a lead locally, maintaining social distance from other people and pets. Dogs may be allowed off lead in a safe area such as a park or enclosed field.

COMMERCIAL DOG DAY CARE

Commercial day care may continue to operate and priority should be given for key workers, and vulnerable people who are unable to make alternative safe arrangements for their dog. Dogs may be collected from their home or owners may drop off and collect their dogs by appointment only, to ensure clients are able to maintain their social distance from others by only having one client on the premises at a time. If dogs are brought to site owners should remain in their vehicles until staff are ready to accept their dog with a similar procedure on return.

Handover should take place in an outdoor space large enough for the client and staff to maintain their social distance (2m should be adhered to where possible). The [business handover protocol](#) set out by CFSG should be followed. The owner should retain all equipment such as leads.

When dogs are collected, only those from households that are not infected or self-isolating should be collected on each trip. If establishments wish to accept dogs from infected or self-isolating households they must be collected and returned separately. Such dogs should not be mixed with those from 'clear' households but may be kept in a completely separate group. The vehicle must be disinfected between journeys.

The entire premises must be cleaned and disinfected at the close of each day.



HOME DOG DAY CARE

Home day care may continue to operate and priority should be given for key workers who are unable to make alternative safe arrangements for their dog. Dogs may be collected from their homes or owners may drop off and collect their dogs by appointment to ensure the maintenance of social distance between clients by only having one client on the premises at a time. Handover should take place in an outdoor space large enough for the client and staff to maintain their social distance (2m should be adhered to where possible).

The [business handover protocol](#) set out by CFSG should be followed. The owner should retain all equipment such as leads.

Dogs from households that are infected or self-isolating should not be mixed with others from non-infected households.

Dogs should be walked on a lead locally, maintaining social distance from other people and pets. Dogs may be allowed off lead in a safe area such as a park or enclosed field.

DOG WALKERS

Dog walkers can continue to operate and priority should be given to key workers, and vulnerable people who are unable to make alternative safe arrangements for their dog. Dogs from Coronavirus infected or self-isolating households may be walked but if doing so they must be walked **after** dogs from all other households.

The [business handover protocol](#) set out by CFSG should be followed with the owner retaining all equipment such as leads. Handover should take place in an outdoor space large enough for the client and staff to maintain their social distance. Dogs from different households may be walked together as long as dogs from infected or self-isolating households are not mixed with others from non-infected households. Social distancing should be maintained for both the walker and the dogs by keeping the dogs on a lead. Dogs may be allowed off lead in a safe area. Any equipment, including the vehicle if used to transport the dog, must be cleaned and disinfected between dogs.

PET GROOMERS

Groomers may accept a dog to be groomed by appointment where this is necessary for the animal's welfare and not simply for aesthetic reasons. Welfare reasons could include on veterinary advice for a skin condition or excessive matting causing the pet discomfort. When routine grooming can be delayed without affecting the pet's welfare until the national lockdown is eased it should be put off.



The necessity for an appointment is to ensure social distancing between clients. If dogs are brought to site owners should remain in their vehicles until staff are ready to accept their dog. The [business handover protocol](#) set out by CFSG should be followed and should take place in an outdoor space large enough for the client and staff to maintain their social distance.

Multiple dogs may be taken in at a time where a grooming salon has sufficient space to separate them and for groomers to maintain social distancing whilst working (2m should be adhered to). Admission and return of dogs must be by appointment only to ensure social distancing where the reception area is large enough to do so.

Groomers can collect dogs from client's homes to undertake grooms for the animal's welfare and not simply for aesthetic reasons. Welfare reasons could include on veterinary advice for a skin condition or excessive matting causing the pet discomfort as long as they can disinfect their vehicle between collections. Pets from infected or self-isolating households should be collected separately from other dogs in different journeys and **after** pets from other non-infected households. Groomers should assess whether the grooming can be delayed until the household is clear to reduce the risk to themselves and their staff. Social distancing should be maintained at all times and [business handover protocol](#) set out by CFSG should be followed with the owner retaining all equipment such as leads.

Mobile groomers and home groomers may continue to operate to undertake grooms for the animal's welfare and not simply for aesthetic reasons. Welfare reasons could include on veterinary advice for a skin condition or excessive matting causing the pet discomfort providing that they can maintain social distancing. Mobile groomers should follow the [business handover protocol](#) set out by CFSG, with the owner retaining all equipment such as leads. The grooming facility must be thoroughly disinfected between pets. Home groomers should follow the [Government guidance](#) on those working in other people's homes. They should not visit an infected or self-isolating household. All equipment must be disinfected between each home visit.

DOG AND CAT BREEDERS

Purchasers are not allowed to visit a litter in person to view a puppy or kitten with their mother in its home environment and so some virtual means of allowing potential purchasers to view is necessary. Puppies and kittens that are ready to be rehomed should be delivered to their new owners by the breeder by appointment providing the handover can be performed using the [business handover protocol](#) set out by CFSG. Where this may not be possible and exceptionally it is considered reasonably necessary for **welfare reasons**, they may be collected. In these circumstances the collection should be by appointment only and the handover must take place outside using the protocol and maintaining social distance and in compliance with other safety precautions.



When a pet is delivered, handover should take place in an outdoor space large enough for the breeder/transporter and purchaser to maintain their social distance (2m should be adhered to) using the [handover protocol](#). Whilst it is desirable to give an item of bedding with a kitten or puppy care must be taken to ensure there is no potential for transfer of virus.

Paperwork and other checks and documentation should be predominantly completed ahead of the meeting. Prior to the acquisition of the puppy or kitten, the purchaser should be given advice on immediate care of them including what food to purchase and allowing them to settle in their new home.

Breeders who are considering mating a bitch or queen should ensure that they have the facility to be able to allow potential purchasers to view the litter remotely if necessary because social distance cannot be maintained and whether the offspring will have sufficient socialisation in the current pandemic. They should also consider how the offspring can be safely handed over complying with the guidance above.

It may not be possible to vaccinate and microchip puppies or kittens during this time. Breeders and purchasers should contact their veterinary practice by telephone first for advice. Where there is a high risk of infection with severe disease such as Canine Parvovirus the practice may be able to provide suitable arrangements for vaccination if a disease and public health assessment by the vet shows it to be appropriate and social distancing can be maintained. The breeder's veterinary practice should be contacted for advice prior to sale. If, on assessment, the veterinary practice feels vaccination is appropriate, it may be that the risk of a visit by a vet and veterinary nurse is considered less of a public health risk than individual animals being taken to each purchaser's practice. If vaccination is undertaken the pet should be microchipped at the same time if not already implanted.

PET RE-HOMING AND RESCUE ORGANISATIONS

Rescue and re-homing centres may remain open within COVID restrictions. Adopters are unable to travel to visit/meet the pet, prior to rehoming it, so some virtual means of allowing the adopter to view the animal in its current environment is necessary. When the animal is ready to be rehomed, the rescue may provide a delivery service. When it is necessary for welfare reasons for the pet to be moved to their new home the organisation may take a pet to the adopter by appointment providing the handover can be performed using the [business handover protocol](#) set out by CFSG. When a pet is delivered handover should take place in an outdoor space large enough for the rescue staff and adopter to maintain their social distance (2m should be adhered to). Exceptionally where delivery may not be possible and it is considered reasonably necessary for **welfare reasons**, the pet may be collected using the same protocols. Whilst it is desirable to give an item of bedding with a pet care must be taken to ensure there is no potential for transfer of virus. A pet should not be taken to an infected or self-isolating household.



Re-homing organisations should accept relinquished animals. Where possible the animals should be collected by appointment and handed over using the [business handover protocol](#). Exceptionally the pet may be taken to the re-homing centre by appointment and handed over using the same protocol.

Providing a suitable vehicle is available animals should be collected by arrangement from households that are unable to provide adequate care for the animals. Staff should be provided with suitable protective equipment and the CFSG [business handover protocol](#) used to maintain social distancing. If the animal cannot be collected and it is considered reasonably necessary for welfare reasons, owners may still be permitted to visit a rescue by appointment for the purposes of relinquishing it. The animal should be placed in the isolation facility and dealt with **after** all other animals on site. Further detail is available [here](#).

PET SHOPS AND OTHER BREEDERS

Selling pets already in stock or coming through the supply chain may continue providing adequate recommended social distance and health precautions can be maintained at all times (2m should be adhered to). A decision to sell small pets should be made on an individual basis having made a risk assessment of the pet shop's ability to carry out the function in accordance with government's Coronavirus safety guidelines and subject to the ability of staff on duty to provide informed care advice about the particular species being sold. Pet shops can also consider arrangements for home delivery of items.

Consideration must be given by breeders as to how the welfare of existing juvenile stock can be maintained whilst the Coronavirus measures are in place and where necessary advice should be obtained on how best to maintain the health and welfare of the animals. This can be obtained from their breeder's veterinary surgeon or in the case of a licensed premises such as a pet shop, the veterinary surgeon assigned to the premises under the Licensing of Animal Activities Regulations.

PET MICROCHIP IMPLANTERS

This guidance is for businesses that provide a microchip implant service. Veterinary practices that implant should follow guidance from the RCVS. Implantation whilst having a pet vaccinated by a vet is the most appropriate solution to comply with compulsory microchip legislation that requires dogs to be microchipped by the age of eight weeks and before change of ownership and for cats. Businesses that provide a microchip implant service may continue to operate providing that they can do so whilst protecting public health by maintaining social distancing and hygiene requirements as advised by [government](#). Implanters should not microchip a puppy or kitten in a household which has someone infected with Coronavirus or who is self-isolating because of the virus.



Microchip implanters may continue to operate providing they do so in a COVID-secure manner. Advice on working in other people’s homes is on the [government website](#).

Microchipping cannot be achieved safely whilst maintaining social distance as puppies and kittens need to be restrained whilst being implanted so the implanter must take with them an appropriately trained second person to provide the restraint. Adequate protection between the implanter and assistant should be provided if they are not from the same household. The litter should be separated from the bitch or queen by the owner and left in a safe and secure area where the implanter can reach them with minimal access to the premises. Once the litter has been implanted all necessary paperwork should be completed online after the implanter has returned home and no paperwork left at the premises except in exceptional circumstances.

After the implanter and assistant return they should thoroughly wash with soap and water and leave to dry any equipment used that cannot be disposed of responsibly. Nothing should be left at the owner’s premises.

DOG TRAINERS

Only one-to-one training outdoors is allowed, where this is necessary for the dog’s welfare, with no indoor training. Social distance should be maintained and class sizes are limited to one-to-one (person or household bubble) to maintain social distance so there is no mixing between household bubbles (2m should be adhered to where possible). There should be no physical contact between the trainer and client or dog and social distance should be maintained at all times.

Owners of dogs from infected or self-isolating households pose a significantly higher risk to the trainer and should not be accepted. Owners can leave their dogs with a trainer providing the [business handover protocol](#) is followed and social distancing is maintained.

Behaviourists should wherever possible work remotely using technology. The behaviourist should make a professional judgement on a case by case basis as to whether it is justifiably necessary to work in a person’s home and it should be very unusual to do so. Further [government advice](#) is available should it be necessary to work in a client’s home.

PET SITTERS

Pet sitters may operate providing they can maintain social distancing rules and following the [Government guidance](#) on those working in other people’s homes. They should not sit for an infected or self-isolating household.