



Commonwealth declares veterinarians as essential

As communicated to you on 27 March 2020, the Federal Minister for Agriculture, the Honourable David Littleproud, provided the following statement:

“The Federal Government considers the role of veterinarians essential to the agricultural sector and therefore to our nation’s food security but also in protecting companion animals and our nation’s wildlife.

At the time of writing this newsletter, the QLD Government has not defined a list of essential services. A list of non-essential businesses is defined under the [Non-essential Business, Activity and Undertaking Closure Direction \(No. 4\)](#). These businesses deemed non-essential must not operate until the end of the declared public health emergency. Veterinary services are not currently defined in QLD as non-essential.

Should QLD veterinarians be restricting what they do?

Veterinarians whether in a professional or personnel capacity must comply with general COVID-19 restrictions such as social distancing and [limits on public gatherings](#). This means that all veterinarians need to consider

developing Covid-19 operating plans to guide which services and procedures might continue to be offered and how staff can deliver veterinary services while appropriately managing Covid-19 risks.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a human health emergency and veterinarians should keep this in mind when determining which services to provide. The provision of veterinary services at this time should adhere to the following principles:

- Mitigation of the risk of transmission of SARS-CoV-2 to humans and animals (noting transmission to and from animals is an emerging area that requires further research)
- Appropriate use of PPE and other essential goods that may be in limited supply.

There is a risk of reputational damage to the veterinary profession if non-essential services are undertaken and potentially undermine efforts to control the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is no listing of veterinary procedures or activities that may be considered to be essential vs elective. There are a number of sources that provide guidance for veterinarians.

Below is a non-exclusive list of services that the Board currently views as being critical or essential veterinary services and should be used as a guide for veterinarians when determining which patients should be seen.

Veterinarians should exercise their individual professional judgment when deciding which essential services they will conduct during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Board regards this as an individual responsibility of registered veterinarians.

A guide to **essential services** includes but is not limited to:

- Initiating and continuing to provide veterinary care for animals:

- in pain
- with conditions which require constant or ongoing treatment to prevent deterioration in well-being
- at risk of serious animal health/wellbeing consequences if the animal is not examined and treated in a timely manner
- with, or at risk of, conditions or diseases that pose a public health risk.
- Emergency and urgent services including:
 - consultations and surgeries (including dental treatments) where pain, suffering or significant deterioration in condition is considered likely without immediate or timely intervention
 - diagnostic procedures required to assess the need, type and urgency of treatment
 - continuing treatment programs including: chronic disease management, chemotherapy, initial course of vaccinations in an at-risk patient, continuous parasite preventions, ongoing medication and food supply
 - assessment of animals to monitor, treat or reduce public health risks or animal disease outbreaks, maintain food safety standards and meet export and biosecurity requirements
 - euthanasia
 - monitoring and administration of animal health measures at animal welfare shelters, research facilities and events requiring a veterinarian by law.
- Consultancy and other services with a role in:
 - food supply chain
 - public health
 - maintenance of health and wellbeing of animal cohorts, such as individual research animals or colonies, flocks, herds and systems of research animals.

A guide to **non-essential** services include but are not limited to:

- Adult vaccination boosters, unless there is a high risk of disease to animal or humans
- Routine wellness checks, dental checks and blood tests where possible
- Desexing surgeries, except in cases of illness or high risk thereof
- Pre-purchase examinations
- Aesthetic grooming and nail trimming

Additional information on this topic may be found at:

- <https://www.ava.com.au/coronavirus/>
- <https://dpiwwe.tas.gov.au/biosecurity-tasmania/animal-biosecurity/veterinary-board-of-tasmania>
- http://www.vetboard.vic.gov.au/VPRBV/Vets/COVID-19_information_for_veterinary_practitioners.aspx
- <https://www.ovma.org/veterinarians/coronavirus-faq/>
- <https://cvo.org/About-CVO/News/Coronavirus.aspx>
- <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19/covid-19-AVMA-resources>