

Veterinary visits in the time of COVID-19

By **Mona S. Miller, DVM**

In October 2019, I wrote an article for this publication that in hindsight, I should have written for this month: Lamorinda Weekly, <https://www.lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue1316/How-to-get-the-most-from-veterinary-visits.html>. It is even more true in these surreal COVID-19 times to “be prepared.”

It is well worth another read of this article at this time, in order to maximize the effectiveness of your veterinary visit. However, I'd like to now add in the components of “be patient” and “be kind.”

Veterinary services have been deemed essential from the start of COVID-19 shelter-in-place policies, and so veterinary hospitals have continued to remain open for business during these past two months. However, there have been some significant changes to methods and protocols of operating in the time of COVID-19.

To start, there is a wide net of definition for what is “essential” veterinary care. Guidelines have been provided to veterinarians by both the California and American Veterinary Medical Associations, but ultimately it has been left to the discretion of each hospital to define what services they provide.

Some hospitals have narrowed the definition to urgent

or emergency unexpected illness or injury, providing this level of service only. Other hospitals have kept the definition wide, including traditional wellness care, such as vaccinations and elective surgeries (spays and neuter, routine anesthetic dental cleanings and evaluations) in the services provided. The California Department of Public Health issued a statement in March that encourages rabies vaccination of pets as an essential service, recognizing that veterinarians provide an important role in zoonotic disease prevention.

Check in with your veterinarian if you are unsure whether your pet needs an examination at this time. If so, plan ahead for less urgent situations – consider making an appointment for 1-2 weeks from now. Allow your vet to keep some openings in the schedule for urgent matters that require same-day examinations.

Veterinary hospitals are following “social distancing” and safety measures to help prevent transmission of COVID-19, and have implemented new protocols to allow vet services to continue. These measures help protect the pet owners, as well as veterinary staff, and keep the physical interactions to a time limit and physical distance. Of course, veterinary staff are wearing masks at all times and gloves (or washing hands numerous

times during the day).

Owners are asked to wear masks, bring their cell phones, limit the number of people in attendance (and in the car) with the pet, and to not bring their pet if owners are experiencing illness. Most pets are being transferred to a nurse in the parking lot or reception area, brought to the treatment room for exam and procedures, and veterinarians are doing primary communication by phone.

Pet owners are being asked to wait in the car, keeping a cell phone line open in order to talk with the veterinarian. Payment is being handled over the phone, and receipts/care instructions are being emailed, in an effort to limit physical paper contact.

If you have any questions at all about how your own veterinarian is handling exams, vaccines, medication refills, protocols he/she is asking of clients, please take a moment to ask the receptionist for these details when you make your appointment. In some cases, emails are being sent ahead of the appointment for you to provide information so that the flow of the appointment can be smoother. If this is the case, please take a few minutes ahead of the appointment to thoroughly complete these questionnaires so that the veterinarian has this information prior to the appointment.

My top list of advice for

pet owners during these times:

1. If you need medications refilled, give your vet plenty of time to get requests processed. Everything is taking longer nowadays, including shipping from online pharmacies. To avoid running out of meds, start the request process 1-2 weeks ahead of time.

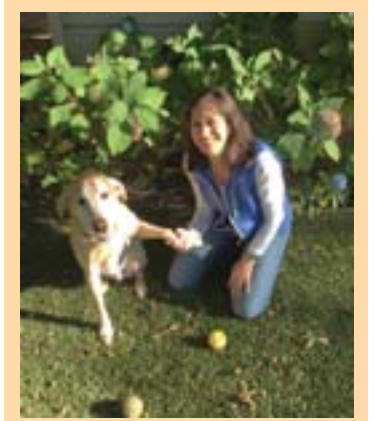
2. For in-hospital exams, adhere to safety protocols – wear a mask, limit the number of people in the car, and do not bring your pet if you have been experiencing signs of illness yourself. Wipe down dog and cat carrier handles with bleach, Clorox or Lysol.

3. For in-hospital exams, be thoughtful regarding efficient verbal communication. Bring a charged cellphone and leave the line open for communication with the vet. If you are a note-taker, bring a pen and paper to take notes during the phone call. Please do not schedule a work conference call during a vet exam.

4. Be patient - this whole process adds 10-20 minutes onto the expected appointment time, much like going to the grocery store takes longer nowadays. The veterinary staff is working hard to make the flow as smooth as possible, with limitations of one-person-at-a-time in the lobby area and back-and-forth communication between vet and client.

5. And as Ellen Degeneres says, “Be kind to one another.” Most veterinary staff have not experienced staying at home.

In the two hospitals in which I work, the days are just as long and fraught with emotional expenditure, and there is now an added stress component of increased risk of exposure to COVID-19, and less “childcare” in the form of school attendance. Please recognize that veterinary personnel are second-line health care providers in this fight against this virus, in the same vein as grocery workers.



Dr. Mona Miller lives in Lafayette with her son, two cats and yellow Labrador. She attended UC Berkeley as an undergraduate, and received her DVM from UC Davis. She has been happy to call Lafayette home since 2001. She can be reached via email at MonaSDVM@aol.com. She welcomes questions from readers that may get incorporated into a column.

Distance learning – lessons learned



Natalie Kassel, Burton Valley fourth-grade teacher

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Faced with reinventing teaching methods, Whitmore acknowledges there were no shortcuts. “It takes a lot of elbow grease and even more time to get an online lesson ready than it does to create a classroom-based lesson plan,” he says.

Burton Valley Elementary School fourth-grade teacher Natalie Kassel certainly agrees. “In the beginning there was a lot to figure out: how to translate lessons into a digital format, how to create and communicate lesson plans, and how to keep students engaged and part of the class community,” she says.

Teachers have been trying to keep broadly to their classroom model of lessons which would typically include a mini lesson, independent work time and sharing at the end. Kassel says that in the digital environment, the mini lesson is a short video, followed by independent work, and finally students are encouraged to share.

Using platforms such as Zoom, Google Classroom and

Padlet, teachers hold office hours to support students. Kassel says the process has involved trial and error.

“One issue that occurred was that many students were not actively watching lesson videos, or some skipped the videos altogether before doing related work,” says Kassel, which prompted her to introduce a lesson on how to learn from a video, including pausing, re-watching parts, and even taking notes.

“One unexpected bright point about Zoom is that my class is getting to know each other more personally, including pets, siblings, and self-directed projects and boredom busters,” noted Kassel, who says that keeping the kids feeling connected and supported is the most important aspect.

Whitmore says that he and his staff aim to stay attuned to students’ social and emotional needs. “A big part of social and emotional growth is respect for diversity and an atmosphere of inclusion, and we know the coronavirus has created challenges in supporting a fully-inclusive school community, so we hope to have an eye to that as we welcome everyone back eventually, too.”

Whitmore is happy that the community has stayed engaged and made a concerted effort to have their children engage with distance learning. “While there have been families who have let us know it is overwhelming, most everyone has been in regular contact, and as time has passed we have heard from more and

more of our families on a regular basis,” he says.

The early days were full of complex decisions for Whitmore but he says he is most proud of the collaboration of the district team at every level of the organization.

“The first two weeks of lessons were done with grade level teams led by principals,” says Whitmore, noting that the collaboration continued unabated ever since.

“The teachers have been amazing but so have our teams of custodians, maintenance and operations staff, aides jumping in to lend a hand. Everyone has risen to the occasion and I can honestly say not a single employee of the district has contacted me to complain about having to empty out our schools or having to conduct distance learning.”

Using a diverse array of tools – packets or home-based materials, occasional small group settings for some, new products or new uses for old products, the teachers are

hoping to reach all students, recognizing that some will thrive and others will find distance learning more challenging.

Whitmore encourages parents to support their children’s education over the summer. “Read together as a family, talk about the books you are reading, stay physically active, ensure there’s an opportunity for social and emotional learning in the midst of all of this,” he says.

“If you hear from a teacher that your student may be challenged in the core curriculum, especially reading, writing or math, make sure you have resources available to keep your student engaged over the summer,” he says, noting the district will make resources available via their website and will be keeping online programs open for the summer when it makes sense to do so.

Whitmore hopes to know better what the next school year will look like

over the next month or so.

Kassel says looking at the next school year brings many unknowns. “We do not know if we will be remote learning, back in the classroom, or a hybrid of the two. Classroom learning enhances peer collaboration, discourse, and immediate teacher support. Online learning facilitates flexibility, self-pacing, and independent study opportunities. We will be intentional in planning for any scenario, trying to maximize student engagement and connection.”

No decision on Lafayette’s controversial 315 apartments; discussion continues

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“That is why the next commission meeting should be public in the traditional fashion, if ‘shelter-in-place’ has been set aside by June 15.”

Altbauer agrees. “It should be very disconcerting to all Lafayette citizens that this meeting was held in the first place and in such a pro-development fashion, so that out-of-town density advocates could get their comments read without having to sit or stand at the library till 1:45 a.m. and provide their addresses for the record,” she says.

“We are, of course, quite disappointed that the Planning

Commission continued the hearing on this important housing project,” said Attorney Bryan Wenter, counsel for the applicant, in a statement after the meeting. “This is the most heavily studied project in Lafayette, it will improve existing conditions and provide important and needed affordable housing in a community that has little, and there is no evidence that it will have any negative health or safety impacts.”

Wenter points out, “As we have repeatedly explained to the city, there is no lawful way to disapprove the project, nor will there be any regardless of how much more it is studied.”

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