



Mississippi Board of Animal Health

James A. Watson, D.V.M.
State Veterinarian

DATE: April 04, 2020
TO: Pet Stores, Groomers, Boarding Facilities, Shelters
FROM: Jim Watson, DVM
RE: COVID-19 Issues and Guidance for Shelter-in-Place

Under Executive Order by the Governor, veterinary clinics and other animal facilities such as feed stores and supplies are considered as providing essential services, but shelters (not associated with government entities), humane organizations, animal transports, grooming, boarding facilities and zoos are not. Within businesses considered essential, certain services are not considered essential, but are those which can be delayed until the Executive Order ends. Please know that being designated as providing a non-essential service at this time does not mean that your work is not important. In the midst of this particular pandemic event, the services rendered by the shelters, humane organizations, and zoos do not directly relate to preservation of human life or safety. It also means that the risk to your personal health in doing these services is greater than the need for the services to be rendered at this time. Animals within these facilities need to be fed and cared for, however, not open for public. The goal of the Executive Order is to reduce the need for people to be travelling and going in public.

If the pet store, shelter, humane organization, or zoo animals need essential services of a veterinarian, the animals may receive veterinary care. Essential services are things like broken bones, diabetes regulation, and infectious disease treatment. Non-essential services, such as grooming, bathing, spays, neuters, and routine vaccinations should be put on hold until the shelter-in-place order has been lifted. Rabies vaccinations may be considered essential or non-essential depending on the circumstances. For instance, an animal that is currently in a shelter is in a confined area with limited public contact and is not going out for adoption; the rabies vaccination can be deferred until the shelter-in-place order has been lifted. Animals that need current rabies vaccination in order to be boarded or must be re-homed may need rabies vaccination. Veterinarians will determine which animals need rabies vaccination as an essential service or they may consult with our office. These will be taken on a case-by-case basis. Keep in mind that in all circumstances in which services are to be rendered, the primary concern is for the safety of you, the public, and then the animal. COVID-19 is a greater risk to you and the public at this time than is rabies.

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Below is some information specific to types of shelters and guidelines on operation under the current Executive Orders:

1. Animal Shelters, unless operated by a city or county government, are not considered essential services and should be closed to the public during the Executive Order.
 - a. Adoptions should cease until the Executive Order is over. The purpose of the order is to keep people at home!
 - b. Animals inside the shelter should be cared for, employees have the right to travel to those facilities to care for the animals. While caring for the animals, employees should follow the CDC recommendations for preventing spread of Covid-19.
 - c. A process should be considered for the possibility that animals may be dropped off at the shelter, and those animals should be cared for. Routine intake should cease, and only be considered if an emergency i.e. a person gets sick and can't care for their animal etc.
 - d. Transport is not an essential activity and like adoptions is not covered under the Executive Order. Veterinarians will be instructed that Health Certificates for transport are not covered under essential functions.
2. A shelter operated by a government entity is exempt by the Executive Order (it is up to the city or county to decide whether or not to stay open.) This is a local decision. Therefore, Animal Control activities should still continue where appropriate. Animal Control activities should not be a high risk activity for spreading Covid-19. The shelters that handle those animals should be available to receive those animals, possibly by appointment.

We all have to make difficult concessions in order to keep each other safe. May these guidelines help you manage this event. We will send additional guidance as we receive questions. Feel free to contact our office if we can be of assistance. This will eventually pass, so take heart. Your service to the communities of Mississippi is very much appreciated and will be more important than ever when this is over.

