

## **Operations and requirements of animal shelters and animal control officers in the Commonwealth of Virginia during this time of emergency declaration due to the COVID-19 pandemic:**

In the Governor's Executive Orders 53 (EO53) and 55 (EO55), certain retail establishments are designated as "essential" or "non-essential." Animal shelters and animal control officers are not specifically included in these designated categories.

However, the order does state the following:

"All businesses shall, to the extent possible, adhere to social distancing recommendations, enhanced sanitizing practices on common surfaces, and other appropriate workplace guidance from state and federal authorities while in operation."

"Nothing in the Order shall limit: (a) the provision of health care or medical services; (b) access to essential services for low-income residents, such as food banks; (c) the operations of the media; (d) law enforcement agencies; or (e) the operation of government."

### **1) Regarding animal shelter closings, reasonable public access, and required holding periods, we are offering the following reminders and recommendations:**

- The following are established by law and not regulation. This office is not able to grant any waivers to these requirements, nor issue any advice for localities to disregard these legal requirements.
  - The governing body of each county or city shall:
    - Maintain a public animal shelter and confine animals therein
    - Abide by the established holding periods
    - Provide reasonable access and make effort to return animal to rightful owners
- This office recommends that animal shelters establish and utilize prudent biosecurity measures. This may, and should, include modifications and limitations to the frequency, methods, and reasons for accessibility, while enabling the animal shelter to identify the owners of confined animals and facilitating the return of those animals.

### **2) Regarding sterilization requirements for animal adoptions during this time when reductions and limitations for elective surgeries have been advised by numerous professional organizations and government agencies, we are offering the following reminders and recommendations:**

- We understand that sterilization services are considered non-essential and access to those procedures may be restricted, which may pose challenges to meeting the required sterilization requirement as stated in VA code 3.2-6574.
- For the duration of this period of state emergency declaration, this office recommends that animal shelters and other releasing agencies establish a plan for sterilization agreement enforcement which takes into consideration the current circumstances.
  - This may include providing separate written notice to each adopter, referencing 3.2-6580, and disclosing the modified enforcement plan as it relates to this emergency period and the resumption of elective surgical procedures following the end of such period. Enforcement of the sterilization agreement is typically an

activity initiated by the releasing agency, and the releasing agency is encouraged to establish reasonable time-frames for resuming enforcement activities as emergency restrictions are lifted and access to services becomes available.

4) Regarding **animal control officer requirements**, we are offering the following reminders and recommendations:

- The requirement for the governing body of each county or city to employ an animal control officer (as defined), and the requirement for all law enforcement officers to enforce the Comprehensive Animal Care Laws (Title 3.2, Chapter 65) to the same extent that other laws are enforced, are in code and not regulation. This office is not able to grant any waivers to this requirement, nor issue any advisement for localities to disregard these legal requirements.
- The State Veterinarian's Office recognizes this state of emergency as cause for granting additional time to complete Animal Control Officer (ACO) Basic Training. Animal Control Officers who are not able to meet basic training requirements may submit a brief written notice by email to [animalcare@vdacs.virginia.gov](mailto:animalcare@vdacs.virginia.gov) referencing "Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Emergency Declaration", and a written extension will be issued for each officer affected.

#### Resources

University of California at Davis. <https://www.sheltermedicine.com/library/resources/?r=animal-services-role-in-covid-19-support>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) COVID-19 Response: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

CDC Animals and COVID-19: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/animals.html>

American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA): <https://www.avma.org/coronavirus>

World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA): <https://wsava.org/news/highlighted-news/the-new-coronavirus-and-companion-animals-advice-for-wsava-members/>

National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians (NASPHV) Compendium of Veterinary Standard Precautions for Zoonotic Disease Prevention in Veterinary Personnel: <http://www.nasphv.org/documentsCompendiaVet.html>

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA): <https://www.usda.gov/coronavirus>

World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) Questions and Answers on COVID-19: <https://www.oie.int/en/scientific-expertise/specific-information-and-recommendations/questions-and-answers-on-2019novel-coronavirus/>