

COVID-19 Guidelines for Co-Sheltering Environments

What is the Co-Sheltering Collaborative?

The Co-Sheltering Collaborative is a national community of homeless service providers, animal welfare organizations, and government agencies working together to create equitable and low-barrier housing for people experiencing homelessness with companion animals.

This document has been developed by the Co-Sheltering Collaborative to provide guidance for co-sheltering environments during the COVID-19 crisis. These practices have yet to be formally evaluated and are recommended based on Collaborative members' collective experience and expertise in veterinary public health and homeless services. Understanding of COVID-19 is changing rapidly, so recommendations will be updated frequently.

Why is it Important to Keep People and Companion Animals Together?

For people experiencing homelessness, the ability to be housed with family members can be an important source of stability. Many people consider their companion animals to be a part of their family. However, due to a general "no pets allowed" rule within social services, people experiencing homelessness are often asked to decide between their companion animals or shelter. We don't believe this is an ultimatum anyone should have to face.

People experiencing homeless may be at higher risk for exposure to COVID-19 due to the lack of options for self-isolation and physical distancing. It is therefore essential at this time that all social services be made available to people experiencing homelessness with companion animals. Especially during this time of uncertainty and fear related to COVID-19, we believe that positive outcomes for people and animals are better achieved by keeping these families intact.

What is COVID-19 and How is it Transmitted?

COVID-19 is a disease that can cause mild to severe flu-like symptoms in people. The CDC, WHO, and World Organization for Animal Health agree that the disease is currently spread to humans through person-to-person contact. At this time the risk of companion animals spreading the illness to a human is considered very low and there is no evidence that they are contributing to the spread of COVID-19¹. However, there have been isolated cases of animals testing positive, mostly after close contact with humans who tested positive for COVID-19.^{2 3 4} Based on the current available information, the practice of co-sheltering does not likely pose any significant risk of human exposure to COVID-19. Out of an abundance of caution, however, physical distancing and hygiene practices recommended by public officials should be maintained, including the extension of all physical distancing considerations to animals' interactions with other animals or people outside of the family unit who are not an emergency contact providing needed care. Additional recommendations may be made as a result of emerging knowledge, including species-specific considerations.

COVID-19 is transmitted through droplets such as saliva or mucus in a cough or sneeze. Transmission via touching a contaminated surface or object (i.e., a fomite) and then touching the mouth, nose, or eyes is also possible, but appears to be a secondary route. As always, careful handwashing, physical distancing, and other infection control practices can greatly reduce the chance of spreading any disease.⁵ According to medical experts, the wearing of masks by all individuals is now recommended and in some places, is required by local government. "CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). Covid-19 and Animals.

https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/animals.html?fbclid=IwAR0ATFvr4bhFMW_4Naj-P68_O0zYLGfWk-tih310ANcB_iMAtt1pJOEdM4E

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). If You Have Pets . <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/pets.html>

³ World Health Organization. (2020). Q&A on coronaviruses (COVID-19). <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>.

⁴ World Organization for Animal Health. (2020). Questions and Answers on the 2019 Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19).

<https://www.oie.int/en/scientific-expertise/specific-information-and-recommendations/questions-and-answers-on-2019novel-coronavirus/>

⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). How It Spreads. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/transmission.html>.

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pharmacies), especially in areas of significant community-based transmission.”⁶ It is not recommended that masks be put on animals.

Planning for Pets in Shelter Emergency Response

Identify staff members with knowledge of your shelter’s internal animal care practices, and prepare to cross-train staff about policies and procedures to ensure the ability to provide consistent, appropriate accommodations for those with companion animals in the event of staffing shortages. These staff should serve as the lead for animal-related issues, which can be especially helpful for clear and consistent communication with animal welfare or other external partners, as well as clients and staff. Consistent with all emergency response messaging, be mindful of language translation issues when communicating to clients about companion animals.

In preparation for “stay at home” actions which may be taken by municipalities, organizations should include animal care supplies in their shared stockpile of resources. These items may include food, bowls, bedding, cat litter, toys, and flea medication. Please be mindful that flea medications and dosage varies with species and size of animal. It is recommended that all companion animals wear proper identification and are microchipped with current registration whenever possible. For a more comprehensive list of items recommended for animals in case of emergency, please review recommendations by the Red Cross, HSUS, or Ready.gov.^{7 8 9}

Organizations should also develop contingency plans in the event that clients are unable to provide care for an animal companion for any reason, such as a medical emergency. Internal policies should permit the organization to make decisions for animal care if an owner is absent or unable to consent to a care plan. Internal policies should also include updating emergency contacts and compiling necessary documentation to include vaccination records, veterinary provider’s name and contact information, basic behavioral information, feeding and medication schedule, and any other relevant information that could help another person or organization care for the animal. External partnerships can help provide assistance with acquiring pet care supplies as well as off-site services such as boarding or veterinary care.

If clients are not experiencing symptoms of illness consistent with COVID-19, interactions with their own companion animals may continue as usual including walking, feeding, and playing. All clients should continue to practice good hygiene during those interactions (e.g., wash hands before and after interacting with animals, as well as before and after handling pet dishes, pet food, and other pet supplies). Clients should also regularly clean food and water bowls, bedding materials and toys, and ensure that companion animals are kept well-groomed. Co-sheltering environments should require all staff and clients to practice current recommendations of physical distancing of at least 6 feet and take extra precautions to prevent contact with others as well as their animals.

Symptomatic Residents Being Sheltered with Their Pets

Although **there is no current evidence of spread from companion animals to humans**, public health authorities’ understanding of COVID-19 is rapidly evolving and guidelines change frequently. Out of an abundance of caution, the following is recommended for symptomatic individuals with companion animals.

Clients experiencing symptoms of illness should restrict contact with their companion animals, including hugging, kissing, and sharing food. If possible, it is recommended that an emergency contact provide temporary care instead. If symptomatic residents have a service animal or must care for their own animals, it is important for them to continue to maintain good hygiene and wash their hands before and after touching or caring for their companion animals. Wearing a facemask is also strongly advised.

Should an animal belonging to a client with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 develop a new and concerning illness, care should be sought from a licensed veterinarian who will work with a public or animal health official, if warranted, to follow state and CDC guidance regarding potential testing.¹⁰ It is recommended that the shelter be prepared to implement

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). Use of Cloth Face Coverings to Help Slow the Spread of COVID-19. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/diy-cloth-face-coverings.html>

⁷ American Red Cross. (n.d.). Pet Disaster Preparedness & Recovery. <https://www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/pet-disaster-preparedness.html>.

⁸ Humane Society of the United States. (n.d.). Pet Disaster Preparedness. <https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/pet-disaster-preparedness>.

⁹ Ready.gov. (2019). Pets and Animals. <https://www.ready.gov/pets>.

¹⁰ Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association. (2020). HSVMA Statement on Testing Companion Animals for SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19). <https://www.hsvma.org/testingforcovid19>

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additional cleaning, disinfection and physical distancing protocols, seek temporary off-site placement options¹¹, as well as provide contact tracing details for both people and animals, if needed.

Residents experiencing symptoms with companion animals who remain on site should be kept physically separate from other residents and their animals. Symptomatic residents should be provided with opportunities to reduce exposure to others, including separate access to an area for meals, hand washing station and restroom, hand sanitizer, face masks, animal care supplies, and a pet relief area. If animals cannot be housed with an emergency contact while the owner is symptomatic, accommodations should ensure that there is enough space to appropriately house or crate the animal with physical distancing to prevent exposure to other animals or individuals. Please see “Grant Funding Opportunities” below for details related to accessing various COVID-19 animal care resources and grants.

Working with Animal Welfare, Veterinary, and Human Social Service Partners for Primary and Emergency Care

Relationships between animal welfare organizations and human social service organizations are essential to linking people in need to programs that can reduce or remove barriers to animal care during any time of crisis. These services may include off-site boarding, temporary foster care, transportation, financial support for routine or emergency veterinary care, pet food banks, educational resources, or behavior and training support, as well as other community support networks such as schools. It is recommended that you work on building long-term relationships with these organizations and groups to ensure that you will be able to continue to identify and meet the needs of this population moving forward.

If your organization operates in a location that has “stay at home” rules in effect, check with your municipality about whether or not veterinary practices qualify as essential services. Certain veterinary facilities may not be open depending on how they are classified in the order. Additionally, veterinary clinics may be operating with limited hours and capacity. It is essential to call ahead and establish a plan with your animal welfare and veterinary partners to ensure that clients’ animals will be able to receive the minimum care required for entry to the shelter or off-site boarding facilities if needed, and that there is also a plan in place to address companion animals requiring care for illness or injury. Think broadly and creatively while developing plans due to the additional challenges that may be present during a time of crisis. For example, consider developing a relationship with a mobile veterinary provider to bring services to clients on site, or consider infrastructure for telemedicine. Veterinarians may be able to communicate with residents via phone or internet and recommend next steps for the pet’s care.

Grant Funding Opportunities

Grant funding may provide the ability to help cover costs associated with housing and caring for pets when local partnerships are not available or do not fully meet this need. Please reach out to your local and state agencies for other opportunities that may be available, in addition to the organizations listed below.

From PetSmartCharities.org:

“PetSmart Charities is evaluating conditions resulting from COVID-19 (coronavirus), and the best ways we can support our partners, pet parents and the pets they love. If you are an organization that is working within the official COVID-19 response efforts, email emergencyrelief@petsmartcharities.org to inquire about possible grant assistance.” For additional details, please visit <https://petsmartcharities.org/pro/grants/emergency-relief>

From GreaterGood.org:

“Currently, we are working diligently in partnership with local, state, and federal partners to address the needs arising from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. We understand your concerns and are empathetic as this is now a national issue. Our GreaterGood.org team is in communication with all of our major corporate donors for pet food & veterinary supplies to gauge availability of product and potential distribution capacity. To better serve you and others, we ask that you please follow this link <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/72a89f573cb04d8793607b428d00e82d> and complete the form attached

¹¹ Temporary off-site placements should only be used when other options have been exhausted. Keeping people and pets together should be the preferred option when possible. Also keep in mind that professional boarding services can be costly, and many boarding facilities may be closed or operating at reduced capacity.

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so that we can effectively gather need-to-know information. Our disaster team is constantly assessing and triaging to award areas with the greatest need, and then coordinating with appropriate entities to devise an equitable plan of action. As plans solidify, we will notify organizations if and where products are available in their area.”

From PetcoFoundation.org:

“We are committed to supporting our shelter partners’ most critical needs through this disaster. Municipal and large organizations with animal control shelter functions can learn more about COVID-19 disaster funding in the Petco Foundation partner portal.” For details, please visit <https://www.petcofoundation.org/relief/>

From Banfield.com:

“COVID-19 Respond and Rebuild Grants provide financial support to nonprofit animal organizations, local/state government agencies, and veterinary schools impacted by COVID-19. Grant opportunities will be offered in two phases: (1) immediate support through COVID-19 Respond Grants for organizations working to provide veterinary care to owned pets, and (2) COVID-19 Rebuild Grants, available beginning June 1, 2020 to assist organizations as they rebuild their capacity to care for pets and resume medical operations.” For details please visit <https://www.banfield.com/banfield-foundation/programs>

From PetfinderFoundation.com

“COVID-19 Operation Grants are available to adoption organizations that have been negatively impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Grant funds can be used to purchase cleaning supplies, food, vaccines, or anything else you may need in order to continue caring for your adoptable pets.” Grants range from \$500 - \$1000. Please visit <https://petfinderfoundation.com/for-shelters/apply-for-a-grant/> for details and to apply. As of May 3, 2020 this grant has been closed due to the high number of applicants but they advise those interested in applying to check back in if additional funding becomes available.

Pets of the Homeless

- Sleeping Crate Program: Collapsible crates are ordered online by Pets of The Homeless and shipped to shelters that submit a request to info@petsofthehomeless.org. Please see their website for required information.
- Pet Food Donation Sites: Please see their website to locate pet food donation sites.
- Emergency Veterinary Care: Please see their website to connect with a case manager for requests for assistance. Business cards can be provided so social workers have this information readily available to them.
- Pets of the Homeless will work with shelter managers and pet owners to coordinate for veterinary care as needed (vaccinations or more extensive care as needed, on a case by case basis) in order to immediately access shelter, whether or not the shelter is interested in receiving crates.

From Department of Housing and Urban Development - Emergency Solutions Grant Program:

“Individuals experiencing homelessness are at greater risk of exposure to a variety of infectious diseases including influenza and coronavirus. Taking effective sanitation measures can reduce the spread of infectious disease for people who are unsheltered or living in emergency shelters. ESG Program recipients may use ESG Street Outreach and Emergency Shelter funds for essential supplies and services to reduce the spread of infectious disease in their programs.” Please visit <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/esg/> for details.

From RedRover

“The RedRover Relief Emergency Boarding grant program helps animals who need temporary boarding while their owners are ill due to the COVID-19 virus. This grant will cover the cost of up to two (2) weeks of boarding while a pet owner is hospitalized, or if the pet owner is recovering at home and unable to care for their pet.” Please visit <https://redrover.org/relief/emergency-boarding-grants/#section-3> for details and to apply.

Maddie’s Fund: [COVID-19 Response Grant Opportunities](#)

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Veterinary and Infectious Disease Reference Resources

American Veterinary Medical Association: [Interim recommendations for intake of companion animals from households where humans with COVID-19 are present](#)

American Veterinary Medical Association: [SARS-CoV-2 in animals](#)

American Veterinary Medical Association: [Veterinary practices are “essential businesses”](#)

American Veterinary Medical Association: [What Veterinarians Need to Know](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [Interim Guidance for Public Health Professionals Managing People With COVID-19 in Home Care and Isolation Who Have Pets or Other Animals](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [COVID-19 and Animals](#)

Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association: [HSVMA Statement on Testing Companion Animals for SARS-CoV-2 \(COVID-19\)](#)

National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians: [Compendium of Veterinary Standard Precautions for Zoonotic Disease Prevention in Veterinary Personnel](#)

University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Veterinary Medicine: [Study Confirms Cats Can Become Infected with and May Transmit COVID-19 to Other Cats](#)

World Small Animal Veterinary Association: [COVID-19 – Advice and Resources](#)

Worms and Germs Blog: [COVID-19 in Animals...A Few Updates](#)

Animal Care and Animal Welfare Resources

American Red Cross: [Pet Disaster Preparedness](#)

Animal Welfare Daily Digest: [Daily Digest Subscription Link](#)

American Pets Alive!: [COVID-19 Animal Shelter Preparedness Guide](#)

Best Friends Animal Society: [Best Friends Vet Access](#) (remote veterinary service)
Download mobile app using code BFHELPS (free for a limited time)

Best Friends Animal Society: [Lifesaving Library](#) (various resources)

Best Friends Animal Society: [Your COVID-19 Pet Preparedness Plan](#) (English and Spanish)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [CDC Healthy Pets, Healthy People](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [COVID-19 and Animals](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [If You Have Pets](#)

Cornell Cooperative Extension - New York Extension Disaster Education Network: [COVID-19 and Service Dogs](#)

Cornell Cooperative Extension - New York Extension Disaster Education Network: [COVID-19 and Dogs](#)

Humane Society of the United States: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) shelter kit](#)

Justice Clearinghouse: [COVID-19: What it Means for Animals and Animal Care Professionals \(The Corona Virus\)](#)

Maddie’s Shelter Medicine Program at the University of Florida: [UPDATED: Important COVID-19 information for animal shelters](#) (various resources)

National Animal Care & Control Association: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Announcements & Resources](#)

Ready.gov: [Pets and Animals](#)

The Humane Society of the United States: [Pet Disaster Preparedness](#)

The Humane Society of the United States: [Compassion in a time of crisis](#)

University of Wisconsin-Madison Shelter Medicine Program: [Animal Services' Role in COVID-19 Support](#)

Worms and Germs Blog: [COVID-19 in Animals...A Few Updates](#)

Pet Owner Support Resources

American Red Cross: [Pet Disaster Preparedness](#)

American Veterinary Medical Association: [Considerations for mobile and house call veterinarians during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

Best Friends Animal Society: [Best Friends Vet Access](#) (remote veterinary service)
Download mobile app using code BFHELPS (free for a limited time)

Best Friends Animal Society: [Your COVID-19 Pet Preparedness Plan](#) (English and Spanish)

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [COVID-19 and Animals](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [If You Have Pets](#)

New York City Emergency Management: [NYC Emergency Management Announces NYC COVID-19 Pet Hotline to Provide Support for Animals of People Affected by Coronavirus](#) 877-204-8821 daily from 8am - 8pm ET

Ready.gov: [Pets and Animals](#)

The Humane Society of the United States: [Pet Disaster Preparedness](#)

Worms and Germs Blog: [COVID-19 in Animals...A Few Updates](#)

Facilities, Cleaning and Personal Safety Resources

American Red Cross: [Coronavirus Safety](#)

American Red Cross: [Steps to Help Protect Against Coronavirus COVID-19](#)

American Red Cross: [Steps to Help Cope with Evolving Coronavirus Situation](#)

American Red Cross: [What You Should Do If Caring For Someone With Coronavirus](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: [Environmental Cleaning Recommendations](#)

Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program at the University of Florida: [UPDATED: Important COVID-19 information for animal shelters](#) (various resources)

Homelessness Resources

Homelessness Learning Hub: [Pandemic Planning: How Can My Agency Prepare for the Potential Spread of Coronavirus?](#)

National Alliance to End Homelessness: [Coronavirus and Homelessness](#)

National Alliance to End Homelessness: [COVID-19: What State and Local Leaders Can Do for Homeless Populations](#)

National Alliance to End Homelessness: [A Framework for COVID-19 Homelessness Response: Responding to the Intersecting Crises of Homelessness and COVID-19](#)

National Alliance to End Homelessness: [Ending Homelessness Forum](#)

National Low Income Housing Coalition: [Coronavirus and Housing/Homelessness](#) (various federal, state and city specific resources)

National Health Care for the Homeless Council: [Covid-19 Resources](#) (various resources)

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: Disease Risks and Homelessness

The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness: Planning and Preparing for COVID-19 (Coronavirus) (various resources)

For more information about the Co-Sheltering Collaborative, please visit www.co-shelteringcollaborative.org.