



Dear Community Leaders and Stakeholders,

The leadership within animal welfare organizations across North America share the objective of every state and local government - minimize the spread of COVID-19 and protect every member of our communities. Furthermore, we know with an estimated 65% of U.S. households owning pets, our companion animals are playing a critical role within the current COVID-19 environment, both physically and emotionally.

As such, we are working diligently to provide the public with accurate, timely and relevant recommendations and information designed to reinforce public safety and wellbeing as well actions that also serve in the best interest of our collective pets. Therefore, in abundance of caution, the Center for Disease Control, the American Veterinary Medical Association and the leadership of University Shelter Medicine programs are currently recommending the following guidelines:

- Pets who are living in a COVID-19 exposed homes and require sheltering due to their caregivers being hospitalized or unable to care for them should be housed in separation, in each community's municipal or municipal-contracted agency and should not be housed in foster homes for the duration of the 14-day recommended hold period.
 - Municipal animal care workers are trained in appropriate and safe handling and care procedures for animals with communicable illnesses and are most prepared to house COVID-exposed pets.
 - Additionally, many or most municipal animal services have a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM) on staff or contract with a DVM who can advise, monitor and oversee the care of pets whose owners are confirmed to have COVID-19.
 - Additionally, housing all COVID-19 exposed pets who require sheltering services will ensure owners, caregivers and loved ones are able to quickly and easily find and reclaim owned pets.
 - It should be noted that most communities have private humane societies with the capability, including proper protocols and procedures, veterinary expertise, experienced staff and capacity to also serve this function. We encourage each community to facilitate a public and private safety net plan that maximizes resources and ensures each organization is paired with responsibilities and efforts that match their competencies and capacities (see attached sample MOU).

In conjunction with these guidelines, the COVID-19 Animal Shelter Leadership is respectfully requesting asking state and local officials to do the following:

- Ensure the municipal shelter maintains adequate capacity of at least **50% of existing kennel space** to house pets who will need sheltering due to their caregivers having COVID-19. It is recommended that municipal shelters review/consider the capacities and capabilities of local boarding facilities as viable holding opportunities for these animals.
- Housing pets exposed to COVID-19 to become an **essential function** of the municipal agency, along with housing animals for rabies quarantine and receiving sick and injured animals in need of emergency care.
- **Encourage collaboration** among municipal and private animal welfare organizations in each community, so that non-profit, private shelters and rescue groups can open their doors for stray and owner surrender intake/placement to maintain adequate capacity in the municipal shelter.
- Limit stray and owner surrender intake into all local shelters to **emergency intake only**, suspending intake of healthy cats and kittens as well as friendly, healthy stray cats and dogs that can otherwise be housed in the community.
- Direct animal services staff to perform **only essential functions**, as outline in the guidelines from the National Animal Care and Control Association, in order to reduce the burden on the shelter system, maintain adequate capacity to house COVID-19-exposed pets, and mitigate risk of exposure for animal services staff (field operations & shelter).
- **Provide support** and encourage municipal agencies to create or expand foster care programs for non-COVID-exposed pets, with the goal of housing a majority of sheltered pets in foster homes through the duration of the pandemic.

These actions outlined above are essential in order to prevent municipal shelters from overflowing with intakes as a result of COVID-19-exposed animals as well as the seasonal surge of intake which is forthcoming. Shelters running at or above capacity within this current environment which could lead to disease outbreaks, owned pets being exposed to shelter-born illnesses, and needless euthanasia of cats and dogs in shelter. **In this unprecedented moment, we are asking you to take action now to protect pets and keep the public safe.**

We greatly appreciate your timely consideration.