



COVID-19 mythbusting series

Covid-19 Safe and Cat Friendly

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Hello, my name is Nathalie Dowgray and I am speaking today on being Covid-19 safe and cat friendly. How can we offer a cat-friendly environment while adhering to cleaning protocols during the COVID-19 outbreak? We are fortunate that Covid-19 is an enveloped virus and as such is relatively easy to kill using the common disinfectants we have available to us in veterinary clinics. This means different cleaning protocols are not required. However, veterinary clinics do need to be increasing the frequency of cleaning especially between animals. For additional information on cleaning and disinfectants, I would advise you to review the RCVS Knowledge COVID-19 resources.

Cats can catch COVID-19 from people and can transmit it to other cats under experimental conditions but to date, no cat-human transmission has been shown. Again, for further information please refer to the RCVS knowledge COVID-19 resources on this topic. There is very little evidence on how to be Cat Friendly under the current circumstances but using resources and information produced for shelter cats is a good place to start. A good shelter operates under the high biosecurity levels that we are currently having to practice in the clinic.

In a shelter, generally, all new cats entering the building are considered a source of infectious disease and the veterinary staff and equipment may act as a fomite spreading disease between cats. Fomites are object or materials that are likely to carry infection. Under COVID-19 circumstances, we need to consider that the cat, the cat carrier and any bedding that comes in with the cat may be a fomite for COVID-19. We also need to consider that if we are infected we may contaminate or infect the cat, putting both the cat and their owner at risk.

Sense of smell is very important to a cat. As the first thing that the cat encounters in an examination is usually your hand, how you are cleaning your hands between consults is very important. Some of you may be choosing to wear gloves and that is fine, if you are, I would suggest spraying a little Feliway on the gloves just before you let the cat out of the basket, allowing time for the spray to dry before you touch or approach the cat. Using soap and water

to clean your hands between cases may be the least offensive to the cats' sense of smell, especially if you use an unscented soap, but again I would advise spraying a little Feliway on your hands after drying them. Alcohol hand sanitisers are very convenient, especially if you have to leave and re-enter the consult room during an examination.

Firstly, try to avoid this and have everything you are likely to need in with you for that cat's examination. However, if you do use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser try and make sure your hands are dry before approaching the cat, as they do find the smell of these very offensive. Between cases always clean the table and any equipment that you have used. Try to use a scent-free disinfectant and consider spraying the table with Feliway or some pet remedy after it has been cleaned. I personally like to use a towel on the table, under the current conditions these are bagged at the end of the consult. We then place them directly into the washing machine at the end of a consulting session. You may choose to ask the owner to put a clean towel in a bag or in the cat carrier; this has the advantage of going back to the owner with the cat and not having to be washed in the clinic. However, you do have to keep in mind this may be a fomite but no more so than the cat itself or the basket and awareness of this will help you mitigate this risk.

For shy cats, it is important they have a place to hide, using their own basket if they have one where the top can be removed is useful and a lot of the examination can be performed with the cat sitting in the basket or again using a towel can be really useful. Cat's Protection has something called a Feline Fort which can be used on the consult room table to give the cat a place to hide and has been manufactured to allow cleaning with disinfectant between cats and is available through their website.

Some cats will require hospitalisation for the day or overnight. The same considerations around cleaning your hands between patients need to be taken with hospitalised cats as well. All hospitalised cats need a hiding place. For day patients consider leaving the cats' basket in the kennel as their hiding place, if they are in overnight then using a cardboard box that can be disposed of afterwards, the Cat's Protection Fort or something like an igloo bed that can be washed should be considered. If none of these options are available then cover ½ the front of the kennel with a towel for privacy. When cleaning the kennel whilst the cat is an in-patient, try to preserve the sense of smell for the cat. Double bedding is something that can be considered; this is where two beds are supplied and only one bed is removed each day and replaced with a clean one, this should be utilised as this preserves familiar smells for the cat.

You can consider using Feliway or Pet Remedy on the clean bedding before it is placed in the pen. Spot clean the pen only if it is not too dirty, again to try to preserve the familiar smells for the cat while they are an inpatient. Cats that are from COVID-19 positive households and require strict barrier nursing should still be provided with a hiding place and bedding but it may need to be something that is disposable or something like the feline fort that can be disinfected properly.

For further reading about feline environmental needs, I would refer you to the AAFP/ISFM Feline Environmental Needs Guidelines, led by Sarah Ellis and published in JFMS in 2013. These are freely available through the SAGE website, even if you're not an AAFP or ISFM member, they are available for anyone to access.

For those you who work regularly with shelter animals or are interested in improving your clinics approach to biosecurity then the BSAVA Manual of Canine and Feline Shelter Medicine Principles of Health and Welfare in a Multi-animal Environment is an excellent resource as well. And that's available through the BSAVA library. There is also a number of available papers on the use of feline pheromones in the clinic, and I've put up a couple for future reference for you as well. Thank you for your time and I hope you found this useful.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/page/jfm/collections/guidelines/index>

<https://www.bsavalibrary.com/content/book/10.22233/9781910443330>

Feliway papers

Contreras, Elena T. et al. 2018. "Effect of a Pheromone on Stress-Associated Reactivation of Feline Herpesvirus-1 in Experimentally Inoculated Kittens." *Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine* 32(1): 406–17.

Pereira, Joana Soares et al. 2016. "Improving the Feline Veterinary Consultation: The Usefulness of Feliway Spray in Reducing Cats' Stress." *Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery* 18(12): 959–64.

For more free COVID-19 resources for veterinary professionals, visit
rcvsknowledge.org/covid-19



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