

Guidance for Companion Animal Rescue & Rehoming Organisations in Wales during Covid-19 restrictions

It is **essential** all pet and horse rescue organisations in Wales adhere to the Welsh Government's [Covid-19 restrictions](#)¹. This also includes [specific advice for pet owners](#)² as well as [equines](#)³ (and livestock).

This document provides Guidance for rescue, rehoming centres and organisations working in Wales during the Covid-19 crisis in line with Welsh Government restrictions on social distancing and travel.

In accordance with Welsh Government guidance, companion animal rescue and rehoming organisations have been able to remain open to provide for the ongoing needs of animals in their care throughout the crisis. Following recent changes to restrictions this guidance has been updated.

This Guidance is specifically intended for rescue; rehoming centres and organisations that handle companion animal species, including but not limited to dogs, cats, small furrries and equines.

References to staff can be extended to include volunteers and other personnel involved in the operation of the rescue. And as detailed within the Welsh Government's [Guidance](#)⁴ to the Covid-19 regulations updated on 11th May 2020, the definition of [Critical \(Key\) Workers](#)⁵ has been restated as including 'Key public services workers' specifically 'charities and workers delivering key frontline services'. It is advisable to issue all staff and volunteers who need to travel to, and for, frontline animal welfare work with a letter on your organisation's headed paper not least of all to guard against potential future lockdowns.

This Guidance is in five sections, covering:

- The admission (intake) of animals into a rescue environment;
- The assessment of behaviour of animals whilst in a rescue environment
- The care of animals whilst in a rescue environment;
- Veterinary care of animals in a rescue environment or to be rehomed;
- The rehoming (adoption) of animals, including fostering (or equivalent).

Individual rescue centres and organisations should consider this Guidance in the context of their operations and in the context of all Welsh Government advice and instructions, and **note that these are subject to change**.

Please note that the following guidance is predominantly based upon the documentation originally produced by the Canine & Feline Sector Group for Defra in England and later developed further with the help of a number of equine organisations from across the UK

Admissions (intake) - covering animals coming into a rescue environment

- Only admit animals you have the skills and resources to care for. Ensure you have enough staff, allowing for absences such as sickness, holiday and the furlough scheme. Avoid overcrowding in your rescue

¹ www.gov.wales/coronavirus

² www.gov.wales/advice-pet-owners-coronavirus-covid-19

³ www.gov.wales/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-livestock-and-equine-owners

⁴ www.gov.wales/coronavirus-regulations-guidance

⁵ www.gov.wales/coronavirus-key-critical-workers#section-39157 [This definition was established on the 24 March 2020]

centre. You may wish to prioritise animals whose welfare is significantly compromised or at imminent risk.

- If an animal owner is seeking only temporary care for their animal, consider referring them to boarding facilities instead in their local area.
- Reduce intake demand by supporting owners to keep their animals in the home environment where possible and work collaboratively with your Local Authorities and local rescues so you can share the burden between you. Consider taking in only those Local Authority stray dogs that have already served their statutory time.
- If you come across a large case of multiple animals in crisis, you don't need to face it alone. Get in touch with the rescue sector groups (see further sources, below), who may be able to provide support and help coordinate a response.
- Owners may travel to a rescue centre to relinquish an animal. This should be by appointment only.
- Owners should call the rescue centre first to discuss the best course of action and to ensure there is space available. The rescue centre should gather, by telephone, as much information as is required and complete any administration before the appointment to relinquish the animal.
- When brought to the rescue, the animal should be accompanied by no more than two people. Only one person should get out of the vehicle on arrival at the rescue and only when called forward. The relinquishment should take place in a secure, outdoor space or a large, well-ventilated room. The amount of time the owner spends at your centre must be kept to a minimum. Face masks (following Welsh Government advice and guidance on use) may also be advisable, particularly in enclosed spaces.
- Alternatively, you may collect the animal. Ensure social distancing with any member of the public and adequate hygiene precautions are in place for your staff. Your staff or licensed transporters⁶ engaged to collect an animal should be easily identifiable with letters of authority and in uniform if provided.
- Where possible and ahead of collection, assess the animal's fitness to travel and identify any health and behaviour needs to inform the most appropriate care for the animal and ensure you can meet those needs, including consideration of euthanasia as a welfare outcome for animals with particularly challenging needs.
- Plan how to carry out the collection safely and first establish if it is a Coronavirus-positive (or suspected) household. If appropriate, book an appointment date and time. Collect the animal in a secure way which maintains at least a two-metre distance between people. Collect the animal from a large room or an outdoor space if possible. Minimise touching the animal. Wear disposable gloves for the duration of the collection and dispose of them appropriately afterwards. For equines see the additional advice from [NEWC](#)⁷.
- Additionally, if collecting an animal from a Coronavirus-positive person or household, you should wear appropriate protective equipment. This equipment should be thoroughly cleaned or disposed of appropriately following the collection and you should wash your hands thoroughly for 20 seconds using soap and water or use an alcohol-based handrub if you don't have immediate access to soap and water.
- Refer to the animal handover guidance⁸ for further information.
- When the animal has arrived at your centre, avoid it coming into contact with other animals, follow regular good biosecurity. For all animals arriving from a Coronavirus-positive household, quarantine for three days (72 hours) and during this time the animal should only be handled by staff wearing appropriate protection. Those animals should be dealt with after all other animals. Any holding areas should be cleaned and disinfected after use.
- All leads, collars, carriers and other equipment that has had contact with the animal should be cleaned with soap and water, disinfected and left to dry for 72 hours before further use.
- Any bedding such as wood shavings should be double bagged and put into general waste.

⁶ Remember journeys over 40 miles may be subject to [regulation](#) if there is a commercial purpose involved

⁷ www.newc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Additional-Guidance-Equine-Rescue.pdf

⁸ www.gov.wales/animal-businesses-rescue-and-rehoming-coronavirus-guidance

- Fully clean and disinfect all relevant parts of the vehicle used to transport the animal. This will include the inside of the vehicle (e.g. steering wheel, gear stick etc), the animal travel area and some external areas (e.g. door handles) as well as keys.

Assessment - of behaviour of animals whilst in a rescue environment

- Assessment of behaviour remains important to avoid the risk of harm to other animals and people, as well as the reputational damage to the sector if animals are not rehomed safely and responsibly. Assessment also helps to reduce the number of animals returned to rescues and helps ensure animals are matched to homes that are likely to be able to meet their specific needs over the long-term.
- Before each animal enters your care, and where possible, take a detailed history of its current environment and personal preferences over the phone, email, webform etc. This can be helpfully supplemented with video footage of the animal in its current environment.
- Assess each animal's behavioural response to the various situations you place them in. Throughout your assessments, consider how the safety of your staff can be maintained. Where it is necessary to have more than one person involved in the assessment of an animal's behaviour ensure social distancing is maintained and the assessment is carried out in an outdoor space or a large, well-ventilated room.
- Consider how animal handlers should respond to an incident in which social distancing has to be temporarily breached e.g. to separate two dogs. In such an event, minimise the amount of time that handlers spend within two metres of one another and immediately afterwards, both handlers should wash their hands for 20 seconds using soap and water.
- Consider using equipment such as long lines to help maintain social distancing and equipment such as harnesses to maintain greater control over an animal.
- Leads, collars, training aids and equipment should be washed and disinfected between each handler.

Care of an animal in a rescue environment

- Focus on maintaining at least minimum legislative welfare [standards](#)⁹ for your animals. You may need to significantly amend your daily routines, including the amount of exercise or handling you can provide, to reflect your staff availability.
- All relevant protocols and care information (e.g. diet sheets) for all species should be readily available to all staff, including those who may not be as familiar as others
- Amend staff rotas to enable social distancing requirements to be met and reduce the risk of infection between staff. Consider dividing staff into multiple (fixed) teams that have no contact to ensure some staff are always available.
- Maintain strong biosecurity measures. Ensure strict cleaning protocols are in place using appropriate disinfectants and animal housing and staff areas are well ventilated.
- Consider how you can enhance environmental enrichment for your animals, as a key measure to manage stress and frustration.
- If appropriate, place animals in temporary foster care until they can be rehomed.

Veterinary care of animals in a rescue environment or being rehomed

- As is normal, check all animals at the point of intake to evaluate for disease and vaccination requirements. Isolate or quarantine animals as required.

⁹ www.gov.wales/animal-welfare

- Veterinary practices may now be able to offer general health checks and vaccination if a disease and public health assessment by the vet shows it to be appropriate and social distancing can be maintained. The establishment's veterinary practice should be contacted and they will determine the best course of action (a visit by a vet and veterinary nurse may be less of a public health risk than individual animals being taken to the practice).
- Good biosecurity is important at all times, but in view of a possible non-availability of primary vaccination¹⁰, biosecurity should be enhanced with increased use of high alcohol content hand gels and/or hand washing between dealing with each animal.
- It may not be appropriate to re-home to households with existing animals as there will be no opportunity to ensure compatibility by meeting on neutral ground.
- Take care when rehoming un-neutered animals to homes with an existing animal. Neutering may be possible if a risk assessment of the public health and animal welfare implications by the vet shows it to be appropriate.
- Explore options with your vet for remote assessment and collection of prescriptions/medicines from the practice when a site visit cannot be arranged. Vets are moving towards getting back to routine work. Plan any visits carefully to meet social distancing requirements.
- When rehoming, accurately record any outstanding vet procedures including vaccinations for each animal, with a process for follow up.
- Check with your insurance partner about requirements for veterinary care prior to rehoming in order to validate insurance cover notes.
- Animals with ongoing complex veterinary issues should not generally be considered for rehoming.
- Consider your policy on euthanasia with your vet. This may need to be reviewed in line with your ability to manage animals on site, the intake demand you may face and the availability of veterinary support.
- Refer to the latest [RCVS¹¹](#), [BVA Wales¹²](#), [BSAVA¹³](#) and [BEVA¹⁴](#) guidance during the Coronavirus pandemic.

Rehoming - covering the rehoming/adoption of animals from centres or directly from one home to another, including the fostering/temporary placement of animals in the care of a home

- Where possible, rehoming should be carried out without members of the public visiting rescue centres. Consider use of digital technology to support rehoming, for example online rehoming applications, online galleries of animals available for rehoming, virtual home checks and video introductions of animals to potential new owners..
- Members of the public may visit rescue centres, by appointment, for the purpose of meeting an animal with a view to rehoming it, or to collect an animal that they have already arranged to rehome. Where possible, viewing and collection should be combined in one visit.
- Introductions between members of the public and animals at rescue centres should take place in secure, outdoor spaces or in large, well-ventilated indoor areas. Limit the number of people meeting an animal at any one time in order to maintain social distancing.
- Where possible you or a licensed transporter should deliver all animals to their new homes. Centre staff, volunteers or licensed transporters engaged to deliver an animal should be easily identifiable with letters of authority and in uniform if provided.

¹⁰ It should be noted that after vaccination commences a previously unvaccinated animal is not immediately covered against the disease being vaccinated against until the primary vaccination course is completed and according to the vaccine manufacturers' guidelines for a specified period of time after completion of the primary course. Always take advice from your vet.

¹¹ www.rcvs.org.uk

¹² www.bva.co.uk/about-us/our-structure/welsh-branch

¹³ www.bsava.com

¹⁴ www.beva.org.uk

- Prioritise local rehoming opportunities to avoid long journeys where possible.
- Plan ahead with the animal's new owner or foster carer and book the date and time for delivery. . Deliver the animal in a secure way and where the new owner/ fosterer has not met the animal previously, ensure that provision is in place to support a settling in period. Always maintain social distancing and avoid entering a person's home. Use the handover guidance¹⁵ or for equines see the additional advice from [NEWC⁶](#).
- Do not rehome an animal to a household in which one or more member is displaying symptoms of (or has tested positive for) Coronavirus – this will need to be verified with the household.
- Rehome animals only when the new owner/s can meet your suitability criteria and where the welfare needs of the animal will be met, including when the new owner/s return to their usual lifestyle or in the unfortunate event of the new owner becoming ill. The physical suitability of a home can be assessed using Google Earth and virtual tours like WhatsApp, Zoom and photos or videos of the setup at home.
- New owners need to have purchased everything they will need in terms of equipment for the animal and a reasonable supply of food and bedding (e.g. to cover a period of at least 14 days if they need to isolate themselves) before they get an animal.
- Keep in touch with the new owner/s. Any post-rehoming home visits should be carried out in a secure way which maintains at least a two-metre distance between people in addition to any Welsh Government restrictions applicable at the time.
- If appropriate, consider short-term fostering as a means of ensuring the suitability of the match between an animal and its new owner/s prior to rehoming.
- Consider the impact of Welsh Government restrictions on your rehoming criteria. For example, all homes for dogs should have outside space to allow exercise if dog walking were to be limited again in future.
- In the event of an unsuccessful rehoming or foster the animal will need to be collected and returned to the rescue centre by appointment, in accordance with the Admissions Guidance, above.
- Ensure that new owners/fosterers can access emergency veterinary care while Welsh Government restrictions are in place.

Sources of further information:

Please ensure all advice you seek from any of the organisations listed below is fully compliant with the restrictions in place in Wales (some sources may only be checking against restrictions that are applicable to England only)

- ⇒ Animal Welfare Network Wales (AWNW) www.awnwales.org
- ⇒ British Small Veterinary Association (BSAVA) www.bsava.com
- ⇒ British Veterinary Association (BVA Wales) www.bva.co.uk/about-us/our-structure/welsh-branch
- ⇒ National Equine Welfare Council (NEWC) www.newc.co.uk
- ⇒ Welsh Government www.gov.wales/coronavirus

The Animal Welfare Network Wales (AWNW) thanks the Canine and Feline Sector Group for their kind permission to reproduce within this Guidance much of the content from the documentation they produced for Defra in England.

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg. This document is also available in Welsh. E-bost/Email: contact@awnwales.org

¹⁵ www.gov.wales/animal-businesses-rescue-and-rehoming-coronavirus-guidance