

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 can remain open to provide for the ongoing needs of animals in their care.

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

This Guidance is in four sections, covering:

- The admission (intake) of animals into 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

- Intake demand may well exceed your capacity so try to only admit animals whose welfare is significantly compromised or at imminent risk in order to keep valuable spaces available.
- If an animal owner is seeking only temporary care for their animal, consider referring them to boarding facilities instead in their local area.

¹ www.gov.wales/coronavirus

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

³ <https://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]

- 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 centre.
- 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.
- When the immediate crisis is over you may need to provide support over a longer term to enable other owners who are in difficulty to help them retain their pets.
- 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 should not be driving to your rescue centre to relinquish their animal since this doesn't constitute essential travel. They should call you first to discuss the best course of action and to ensure you have space. You may then collect the animal providing you ensure social distancing with all members of the public and ensure 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Care of an animal in a rescue environment

- Focus on maintaining at least minimum legislative welfare [standards](#)⁸ 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

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-welfare

- Amend staff rotas to enable social distancing requirements to be met and reduce the risk of infection between staff. Consider dividing staff into multiple 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.
- Veterinary practices may 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 as the risk of 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 vaccination⁹, 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. If a vet considers a visit is essential, plan this 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 [RCVS](#)¹⁰, [BVA Wales](#)¹¹, [BSAVA](#)¹² and [BEVA](#)¹³ 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

- The public cannot visit rescue centres to rehome an animal since this does not constitute essential travel. You or a licensed transporter should deliver all animals to their new homes.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ www.rcvs.org.uk

¹¹ www.bva.co.uk/about-us/our-structure/welsh-branch

¹² www.bsava.com

¹³ www.beva.org.uk

- Prioritise local rehoming opportunities to avoid long journeys where possible.
- Centre staff, volunteers or licensed transporters engaged to deliver an animal should be easily identifiable with letters of authority and in uniform if provided.
- Ensure there will be no physical contact between the new owner/foster carer and your staff, prior to transfer of the animal. Consider introducing an animal to a potential new owner or foster carers using video calling facilities or equivalent. For equines see the additional advice from [NEWC¹⁴](#).
- Plan ahead with the animal's new owner or foster carer. Agree how to carry out the delivery safely. Book the appointment date and time. Deliver the animal in a secure way and which allows for the new owner to meet the animal, whilst maintaining at least a two-metre distance between staff and the new owner/s. Minimise any time spent in the owner's home. 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 and consider carrying out a post-rehoming home visit once the situation returns to normal and travel restrictions are lifted.
- 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.
- In the event of an unsuccessful rehoming or foster the animal will need to be collected and returned to the rescue centre, 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

¹⁴ www.newc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Additional-Guidance-Equine-Rescue.pdf