

# Issue No9: COVID-19 (coronavirus):

## INFO FOR PET OWNERS

The introduction of the coronavirus lockdown across the country has raised questions on how people should continue to care for their pets.

These include how strict limitations on outdoor movement affect dog walking and if owners can access vital veterinary services.

Here are answers to owners' questions:

### – How often can I take my dog out for a walk?

Government guidance is that people should only be leaving their house to exercise once a day.

Daniella Dos Santos, president of the British Veterinary Association (BVA), said dog owners should use this as an opportunity to give their pets a good exercise, while observing two-metre social distancing requirements.

She said owners should avoid group dog walks and use gardens if available, while households of multiple people, if not self-isolating, could take turns taking a dog out.

### – What if I am self-isolating?

Ms Dos Santos said self-isolators could get someone from outside the home to walk their dog if they are careful to ensure minimal contact.

“That person just needs to exercise good hygiene precautions, whilst trying to maintain that two-metre distance as well,” she said.

The Blue Cross animal charity said local community groups are offering to walk dogs or pick up essential pet supplies.

It advised volunteer dog walkers to use their own leads or disinfect the owner's.

Owners are also advised to wash their hands after handling pets and avoid stroking and handling animals straight after using sanitisers.

### – What about taking the dog out for regular toileting?

Ms Dos Santos advised people living alone who have no access to a garden and need to take their pet out to be “pragmatic and very sensible”.

She said the BVA's interpretation is that they should “keep as close as possible to your property and be very certain to follow social distancing and return to your property straight away as soon as the dog has toileted”.

### – Can dogs spread coronavirus?

Ms Dos Santos said there is no evidence that dogs can spread Covid-19.

### – How can I look after my pet at home during lockdown?

Blue Cross said pets can be kept healthy and mentally stimulated if owners focus on games and training.

Examples include hiding treats to find around the house, playing fetch or tug with soft toys, scratch posts, climbing apparatuses and hide-and-seek games.

Pets like dogs should also spend rest periods in separate rooms, to avoid the potential for separation anxiety when owners go back to work.

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### – Are vets still open?

Yes, but practices are being advised to provide urgent and emergency treatment only for the time being.

Owners are urged to call ahead for advice and not to visit practices in person, with remote consultations over phone or video possible.

The RSPCA is also running an emergency-only service through its frontline staff, hospitals and centres.

### – What is happening to pet shops and pet food?

The Pet Food Manufacturers Association said it had successfully lobbied the Government to ensure pet shops remain open during the lockdown as they provide an essential service.

Chief executive Michael Bellingham added: “Pet owners can contribute to a smooth supply of pet food by shopping sensibly and avoid stockpiling.”

**For further information and self-isolation advice, visit:**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>