

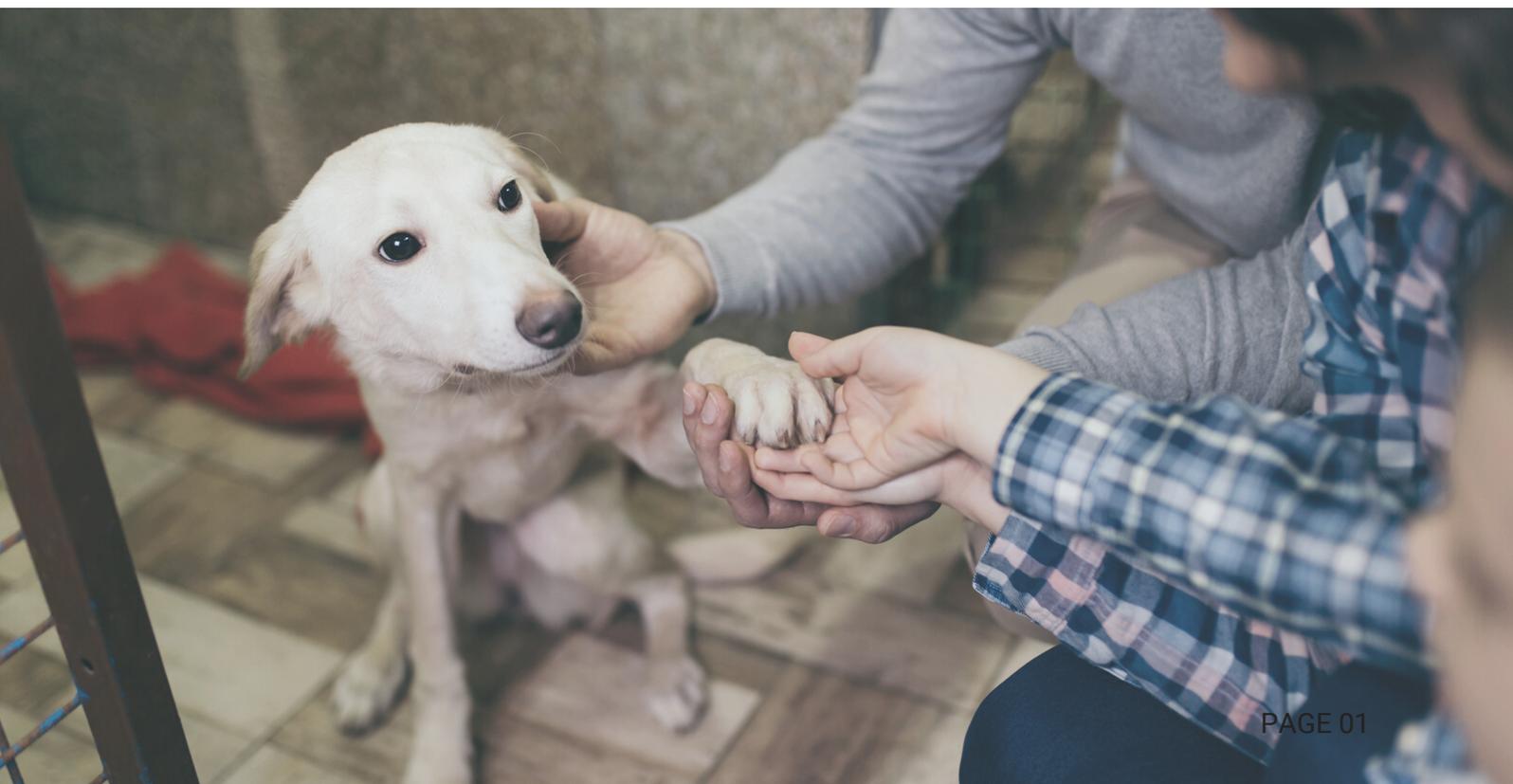
ADVICE FOR SHELTERS

Shelter intake practices

The major impacts on animal shelters from the COVID-19 outbreak are higher numbers of animals being taken in and fewer adoptions and rescue options. Staff shortages are also likely because of illness or self-isolation. Shelters must balance the public health of their community and of their staff with their goal of saving animals' lives. To help achieve this balance, **shelters are advised to suspend non-essential functions**, including the pick-up, transport and sheltering of dogs or cats that are not in imminent danger.

Fostering

Given the immense strain on shelters during the current COVID-19 outbreak, **fostering has proven to be a mechanism to enable sheltering organizations to protect the most vulnerable community populations and their pets.** Fostering helps reduce the burden on shelters, particularly in light of a potential increase in the intake of pets from those who are sick or hospitalized. In most instances, shelters already maintain a network of active, trained foster care providers. During the months ahead, many people may face financial challenges, which may limit their ability to care for their pets and this could place an additional strain on shelters. Keeping pets out of shelters through fostering and other life-saving mechanisms, will enable them to use their kennels for other animals in need and to operate with fewer staff. Most importantly, it will enable them to continue saving lives.



A potential way to minimize the risk of shelters being overburdened with returned foster dogs and cats once quarantine has ended is a 'foster-to-adopt' model. In this model, foster care providers are trained to market for adoption the pets they are fostering so that the animals are adopted directly from the foster home and never return to the shelter. Another option is to stagger the return of animals in foster homes to the shelters. This will allow the shelter more time to plan and structure the return of fostered pets. While there is still a risk of shelters facing a large number of animals returning from foster homes following the end of quarantine, the benefit to the shelters, animals and communities far outweighs the risk.



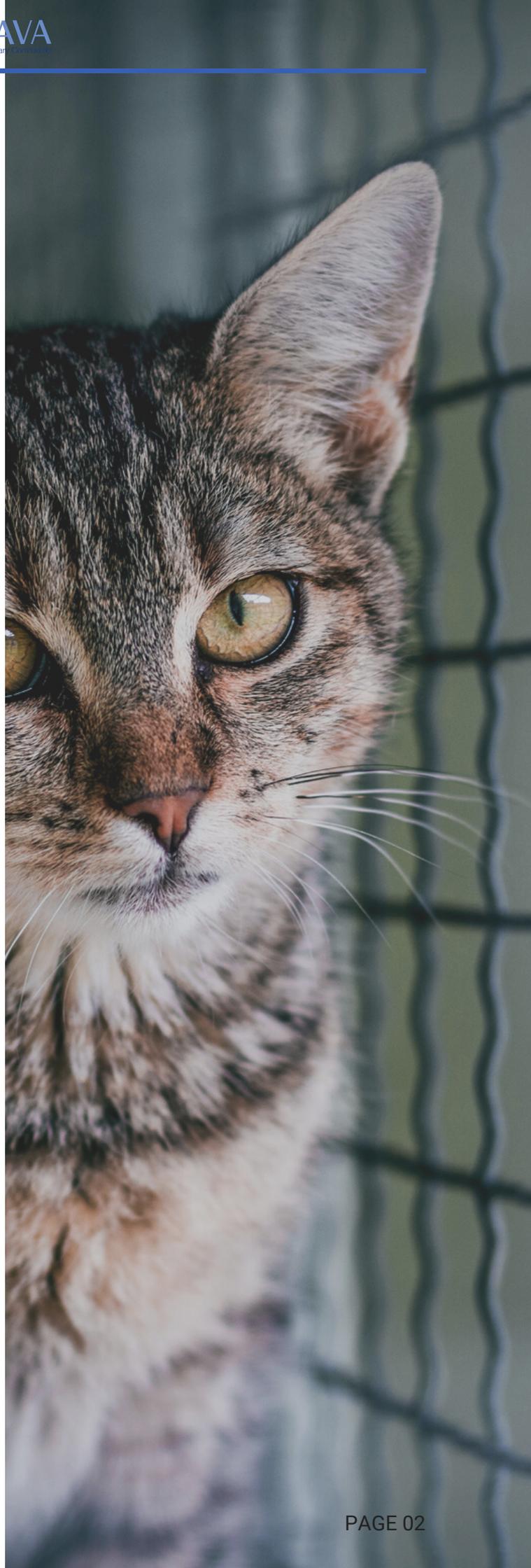
[Animal Sheltering Magazine recently published an article to help shelters expand their foster networks:](#)



[Foster and volunteer training opportunities during the COVID-19 outbreak are online here via the Association of Animal Welfare Advancement.](#)

ADVICE FOR FOSTER HOMES

Foster care providers should follow the guidelines and protocols set by the organization they foster for. In general, these include at a minimum, providing pets with proper food, access to water at all times, daylight, appropriate socialization, activity and health care. Foster pets must be kept in climate-controlled homes where the temperature is kept between 15 and 27°C (60 - 80°F).



Foster care providers should only treat foster pets with medications and supplements with the agreement of the shelter organization and veterinary staff.

If you are fostering a dog:

Make sure that you have the appropriate supplies at home before bringing the dog home. These include poop bags, food bowl, water bowl, appropriate diet, a comfortable and safe place to rest, a leash and harness. Make sure that the dog is properly fitted with a collar, or preferably a harness. If necessary, ask the shelter staff to check the fit. The dog should have a leash properly attached to its collar or harness. Check to be sure that all equipment is fastened and that no equipment is frayed or worn. Flexi / retractable should not be used.

Puppies and dogs should never be left unsupervised outdoors and should always

be kept on a leash or in a securely fenced yard. It is recommended that foster pets do not interact with people or pets outside of the foster household during the 'lockdown' period.

If you are fostering a cat:

Kittens and cats in foster care should be kept indoors. Guidance on providing for the welfare needs of indoor cats can be found here:



[AAFP and ISFM Feline Environmental Needs Guidelines](#)

When being transported, cats and kittens must be kept in secure carriers. Foster kittens/cats should only be introduced to, and allowed to socialize with other pets, if this has been approved by the shelter organization.

INTAKE AND HANDLING OF ANIMALS EXPOSED TO COVID-19

Please refer to the AVMA advice on handling exposed animals:

Interim recommendations for intake of companion animals from households where humans with COVID-19 are present





ADOPTION PROGRAMS

Animal shelters and animal welfare organisations should keep their activities to a minimum during this period but adoption programs do not have to be suspended during the pandemic and can still be carried out in a safe manner if precautions are taken.

Remember to stay at a safe social distance of more than two meters (six feet) from other people, wash hands with soap and water before and after handling animals and minimise the number of visitors to the shelter. Some adoption program options that have already been implemented include:

- ▶ **appointment-only / call-ahead adoptions**
- ▶ **curb-side adoptions**
- ▶ **foster-to-adopt**

Some shelters are offering virtual tours of their shelters to showcase the animals available for adoption and carrying out adoption interviews by phone or video conference.

Adopting animals that have not been spayed or neutered:

Shelters, veterinary clinics and spay-neuter clinics should **prioritize procedures, including spay-neuter surgeries and discontinue those that can be deferred** to reduce resource-use, workload, and the potential for human exposure. Most spays and neuters, even pre-adoption, are non-emergency procedures.

In the US, the National Animal Care and Control Association (NACA) and the ASPCA have emphasized that shelters should continue to provide 'live outcomes' (any good outcome that does not result in death) for sheltered cats and dogs even if pre-adoption spays and neuters are not available. Euthanasia should not be utilized as an alternative to releasing animals to adopters/foster unsterilized. Possible alternative solutions will vary, but can include:

- ▶ adopting with vouchers to return for surgery when the pandemic has resolved
- ▶ utilizing foster-to-adopt programs where laws require sterilisation prior to adoption
- ▶ manually checking up with adopters as soon the pandemic is over to ensure the animals will be neutered.

Removing other obstacles to adoptions should also be considered such as:

- ▶ reducing adoption fees
- ▶ providing adoption interviews by phone
- ▶ encouraging foster-to-adopt when possible

ADVICE FOR CAT AND DOG POPULATION MANAGEMENT AND OTHER OUTREACH PROGRAMS

During the critical period

During critical periods of the COVID-19 pandemic, medical services in many countries may be overwhelmed by the number of patients at medical treatment facilities. Medical equipment and supplies, including personal protective equipment (PPE), may be in short supply. Some medical services are requesting medical equipment from veterinary practitioners (eg ventilators).

In countries where private veterinary practices and other veterinary outreach services are allowed to continue, **veterinary teams should prioritize their services to essential services only.** This limits the use of equipment and PPE, allowing the bulk of these essential items to be diverted to medical services to control the pandemic. Limiting veterinary services also allows for appropriate social distancing without overcrowding practices and limits the risk of exposure to veterinary teams and their clients.



Essential veterinary services are procedures that are immediately lifesaving for the patient. Elective surgeries and non-emergency procedures should be postponed. Vaccinations and neutering surgeries are considered as non-essential. However, in some shelters and communities, timely vaccinations are necessary for disease prevention in highly endemic places or to reduce the risks of zoonotic disease in the human population.

There are many organisations or groups conducting neutering programs such as 'trap-neuter-release' (TNR) or 'catch-neuter-release' (CNR) or 'animal birth control' (ABC) as part of overall dog or cat population management. These **neutering programs should ideally stop** during the lockdown period and adhere to the advice of the country/region they are in.

Instead, groups can work with the community or animal caretakers to identify pregnant animals or new-borns so that they can prioritise them when neutering programs resume. Ideas for other work that can be carried out during lockdown are listed here:



[ICAM answers FAQs on COVID-19 and companion animal population management](#)

Towards the end of the critical period

As lockdown rules start to relax, animal welfare programs may begin to resume operations. However, considerations and risks should be assessed before resuming operations, as **priorities for animal welfare programs may shift**.

In disasters and crises, there may be increased disease transmission caused by free-roaming animals. Some of these animals may travel further outside their territories to seek food when their usual sources of food are disrupted, causing secondary disease outbreaks to spread to other animals or humans (eg rabies). In some cases, animals have been blamed for the crisis and viewed negatively. This results in a breakdown of the human-animal bond and can lead to retaliatory mass culling of animals and the unnecessary suffering this causes.

The WSAVA calls on animal welfare organisations to prioritize preventive measures to prevent wide scale suffering. These could include starting a treatment or vaccination program, or awareness programs before resuming neutering programs.

In some places, animal welfare concerns may become more apparent after this pandemic. Where no animal welfare programs are in place, we encourage the public, the authorities, and the veterinary community to establish them.