

# WSAVA Advice for Pet Owners during the COVID-19 Pandemic



## WSAVA SUPPORTS GENERAL ADVICE GIVEN ON SOCIAL DISTANCING TO EVERYONE, INCLUDING PET OWNERS:

- ▶ Stay at home
- ▶ Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- ▶ If you go out, stay at least two metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- ▶ Wash your hands frequently with soap and water

**To date there is no evidence of infection of humans with COVID-19 from pet dogs or cats. Pet owners should follow guidance and should not abandon their pets.**

### If you have symptoms

You should self-isolate, seek medical attention where appropriate and ask someone outside your household to walk your dog for you. Avoid kissing your pet, being licked or sharing food with your pet. If you have tested positive for Coronavirus you should limit physical contact with your dog or cat and have a backup care plan in place should you become too ill to care for them.

### If you do not have symptoms

All non-essential trips to the veterinarian should be avoided. If your pet needs urgent treatment, you should take them, but must remember to wash your hands and remain two metres away from anyone outside your household. Please contact your veterinarian before going to see them.

### General Advice

Dogs and cats will benefit from the additional companionship but also require their own space, ideally a secure resting place that is off-limits to other family members and where they can rest undisturbed. Dogs and cats generally sleep for 15-20 hours per day depending on life stage so don't panic about keeping them constantly entertained. Both dogs and cats require a nutritious species-appropriate diet and the opportunity to toilet regularly.

Please ensure that you have adequate food, pet supplies (e.g. cat litter) and medications for your pets and delay any routine, non-urgent veterinary appointments.

**Make sure you wash your hands before and after touching your dog or cat.**

▶ [View infographic on pets and COVID-19](#)

## Access to veterinary services

WSAVA is urging governments and authorities to ensure that pet owners have access to essential pet services including pet food, cat litter and essential veterinary services. However, because of social distancing requirements your veterinarian may only be able to offer essential first aid and emergency services or tele-consultations. Please contact your own veterinarian to discuss your pet's medical needs throughout this time, especially if they require ongoing veterinary support.

## Working from home

If you're working from home try to maintain as many routines as possible: feeding time, playtime and normal mornings and evenings. If possible, try to find a place in the house to work where your dog or cat doesn't spend too much time. If your dog or cat pesters you for attention then try and ignore them. Don't feed him or reinforce the behaviour with attention or you'll never get any work done again!

Also remember that change can be stressful for pets so, whether it's the restriction of outside access, reduced

exercise, or having a busier household, any change in routine and environment can be difficult for your dog or cat, especially as they don't understand why it is happening. It's important to remain calm and patient with them as they learn to adjust.

Please follow your local protocols on going outside the home. If you are allowed to, do walk your dog at least once a day for some exercise and opportunity to toilet. Be a responsible dog owner by keeping your dog under your control at all times and pick up after your dog.

## Dog-child safety in the home

Whilst dogs and children are cooped up together it is important that small irritations don't escalate. Ensure that your dog is not disturbed when eating or sleeping. Make sure your dog is praised for calm, quiet behaviour, and ensure you are familiar with signs of stress in dogs, and able to supervise any child-dog interactions appropriately. Below are some resources and quizzes to ensure you can identify stress signals in dogs and help children interact appropriately with them.

### RSPCA Infographic



### RSPCA video



### Body language & quiz



# ENTERTAINING YOUR DOG AT HOME

## Rotate toys

Don't give your dog access to all the toys all of the time – novelty is exciting and your dog will be much more interested in playing with toys that he hasn't seen for a while. You don't need to spend money on new toys all the time. Just put some toys away for a week or so and rotate them to keep them fresh and interesting.

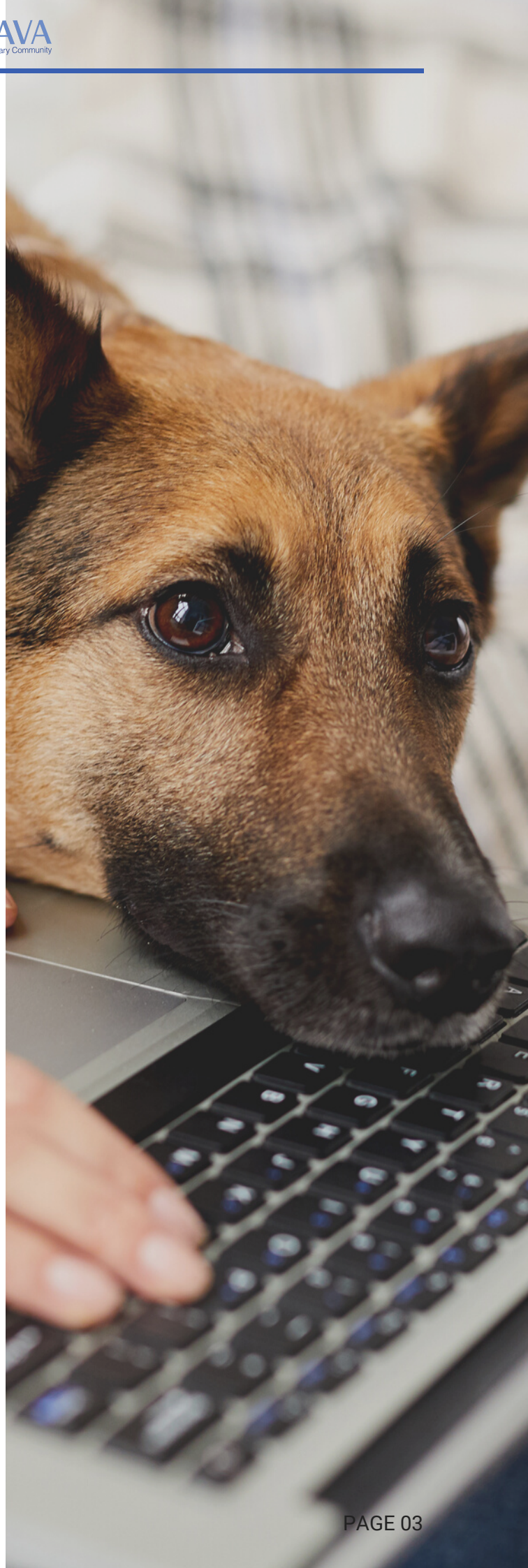
**Scatter feed in your garden, on a deep pile rug, or make your own snuffle mat**  
[Find out how to make your own here](#)

## Feed using a puzzle feeder or slow feeder.

Puzzle or activity feeders slow down the rate of eating, keeping dogs occupied for longer periods of time and encouraging them to stay mentally engaged. Commercial puzzle feeders are available or you can use treasure hunt or scatter feeding approaches to make feeding times more fun around the house and garden.

## Nose-work.

Your dog's sense of smell is incredibly sensitive. Nose-work offers both physical and mental benefits for your dog. To encourage your dog to 'seek' an odour, you need a reward – this could be food (care not to offer too many treats without adjusting your dog's daily diet) or a favourite toy. To start nose-work, have your dog stay in place and whilst they are watching, go and place a food reward or favorite toy at the other end of the room. Return and ask them to 'find it'. Repeat this a few times. Once your dog understands 'find it', you can increase the difficulty by putting the treat or toy out of sight.







# TRAINING

## Obedience

You can use time at home to focus on training basic commands if your dog needs a refresher. Sit, wait, down and come are all important basic commands your dog should know. Additionally, your dog should be able to walk to heel on and off lead. Useful resources for force-free training include:

[Dogtraining by Kikopup](#)

 YouTube

[Dogs Trust Dog School](#)



## Training for husbandry

Many veterinary clinics will not be able to provide routine services during social distancing, and many groomers will also be closed. There's help online here:

[Domesticated manners](#)

 YouTube

[Sophia Yin claw clipping](#)

 YouTube

## Exercise

You might not be able to go out for walks so often but you can still exercise your dog at home.

## Play a game

Catch? Fetch? Tug of war? These games are fun and give you the opportunity to teach your dog 'impulse control' by ensuring they are able to control his or her excitement and 'leave' the toy in order to allow you to pick it up again and continue the game.

If your dog is very energetic you may want to make a flirt pole to increase his or her exercise at home.

 [How to make a flirt pole](#)



# ENTERTAINING YOUR CAT AT HOME

If you're self-isolating due to COVID-19, you should minimise the amount of time your cat spends outdoors unsupervised if possible. If your cat is kept indoors there are basic provisions that you can provide to ensure your cat has a good quality of life. These include:

## Count your resources

- 1** Providing at least one large litter tray in a quiet place; clean it regularly. Cats are often reluctant to use a dirty or small tray or one located in a busy area. If your cat is used to toileting outside, you may need to add compost or dirt to the tray until your cat gets used to using it.
- 2** Ensure your cat has enough space. Indoor-only cats should have access to several rooms.
- 3** Allow your cat access to a minimum of two types of resting places, one at floor level, enclosed on three sides and another higher one with a good view.
- 4** Provide scratching posts in several locations so that your cat can mark their territory, strengthen muscles and sharpen their claws. Ensure the post is tall enough for your cat to fully stretch up, or the cat may not use it.
- 5** If you have more than one cat, ensure that for each type of resource (feeding place, bed, litter tray etc.) there are at least one per cat plus one extra. This means that if you have three cats, you should provide at least four feeding places, four litter trays and four resting places. These resources should be distributed around the home to prevent one cat guarding the resources





### **Remember you are an important resource.**

Provide opportunities for daily play and exercise to stay fit and healthy. Cats have a natural instinct to stalk, pounce and catch moving objects so if they can no longer do this outdoors, they'll need something to hunt indoors instead. Fishing rod toys, particularly ones with feathers, are fantastic for this and they also allow you to play with your cat from a safe distance.

You will be your cat's main companion, so make plenty of time to interact.

### **Use a pheromone diffuser.**

Pheromone diffusers are a great way to keep your cat calm if the household is busier with family members working from home. Products such as Feliway release calming cat pheromones into your home that only your cat will be able to detect, providing them with a familiar scent that will help them to relax.

### **Create a safe haven.**

All cats should have a secure spot they can retreat to for some peace and quiet. It is especially important that any children in the house are respectful of this. Ensure this spot is a calm environment and pair it with pheromone spray or treats so that your cat is calm and enjoys spending time there. Ideally it should be screened from view and raised up off the floor.

### **Feed using a puzzle feeder or activity feeder.**

Puzzle or activity feeders, slow down the rate of eating, keeping cats occupied for longer periods of time and encouraging them to stay mentally engaged. Lots of commercial puzzle feeders are available, or you can use a scatter feeding approach to make feeding times more fun around the house.

**More details on providing for your cat indoors can be found at:**



[ISFM environmental needs](#)

[Icatcare website](#)