

Life changed for dogs during lockdown

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They are loyal companions to thousands of people. Now, research shows the lockdown experience of Britain's favorite dog breed affected their lifestyles and veterinary care.

Labradors had similar levels of illness overall but went to the vet less often during the early months of the [pandemic](#), according to a new study.

This highlights that [dogs](#) might not have received their usual veterinary care when they were ill. It is possible owners had difficulties accessing veterinary services or that they perceived their dogs' ailments as too minor to treat in the circumstances, say researchers.

The number of Labradors being vaccinated was down too as a result of there being fewer vet visits.

Experts say the findings should prompt owners to speak to their vet and make sure any gaps in their dog's vaccination history are addressed.

Exercise

However, not all impacts of lockdown were negative. Just as some people stepped up their fitness routines, Labradors enjoyed an increase in exercise and they were less likely to be given treats by their owners.

Labrador owners also reported less coughing by their dogs, which might have included infectious causes like kennel cough—a perennial ailment in dogs.

A reduction in dogs' social interactions may have stemmed the spread of bugs, the team says.

Researchers from the University of Edinburgh gathered data from more than 4,000 Labrador owners in England between March and July 2020.

The team also found that, compared with previous years, Labradors were less likely to be insured, which may have been linked to the uncertain financial situation of many owners.

Dogs in the study sample were, however, more likely to be wormed—most probably because owners were spending more time with their pets and less likely to forget.

Future pandemics

Researchers say the findings can inform owners and vets of the best practices for keeping dogs healthy during future pandemics.

Future studies should aim to help veterinary professionals and owners minimize the negative impacts of a pandemic on dogs, the research team says.

The study is published in the journal *BMC Veterinary Research*, and was supported by the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council.

Research was carried out as part of the Dogslife project, which is based at the University's Roslin Institute and investigates the genetic and [environmental factors](#) that keep dogs healthy.

Dogslife has collected information from the owners of Kennel Club-registered Labradors since 2010.

"Lockdown restrictions had a significant impact on Labrador retrievers. The implications of the changes are complex and further research should aim to shed light on how negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions on dogs can be minimized," said Charlotte Woolley, lead author and a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Edinburgh's Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies.

More information: Charlotte S. C. Woolley et al, The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on a cohort of Labrador retrievers in England,

BMC Veterinary Research (2022). [DOI: 10.1186/s12917-022-03319-z](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12917-022-03319-z)

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