Dog owners' concerns and experience accessing veterinary care during the COVID-19 pandemic

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New research indicates that the veterinary profession responded well during the COVID-19 pandemic despite many dog owners feeling concerned about the availability of veterinary care during this time due to service restrictions.

In the study published in *Veterinary Record*, investigators at Dogs Trust, a British animal welfare charity and humane society, analyzed surveys completed by dog owners in the UK in May (during the first nationwide lockdown) and October 2020. The team also examined diaries completed by dog owners in the UK or the Republic of Ireland in April–November 2020.

During the first stage of the nationwide lockdown, UK government advice about limiting service provision resulted in the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and British Veterinary Association jointly issuing guidance to the profession regarding restricting non-emergency veterinary healthcare. Alongside this, in the initial months of the pandemic, veterinary healthcare availability worried 32.4% (1431/4922) of respondents. However, between late March and November, 99.5% (1,794/1,843) of those needing to contact a veterinarian managed to do so.

Over one-fifth of respondents (22.2%) experienced remote consultations during the early stages of the pandemic.

Delays and cancelations of procedures affected 28.0% (82/293) of dogs that owners planned to neuter and 34.2% (460/1346) of dogs that owners intended to vaccinate.

"The majority of the respondents thought that remote consultations were convenient. This method also enabled those who were shielding or unable to travel to the practice to access veterinary care," said co–first author Sara C. Owczarczak-Garstecka, Ph.D. "It's reassuring that despite owners' fears about service restrictions, veterinary practices appear to have adapted well to unprecedented circumstances and responded to owners' urgent care needs," added co–first author Katrina E. Holland, Ph.D.


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