



FEAR FREE COVID-19 CANINE CONSIDERATIONS

In the face of the **COVID-19** pandemic, many veterinary practices have made operational changes to mitigate disease spread and stay in alignment with government and public health directives. These changes may present some additional potential triggers for fear, anxiety, and stress (FAS) in our patient population. Fundamental Fear Free strategies are more important than ever for our patient population.

Many practices have transitioned to curbside/carside service, taking pets into the practice while the owner waits in their car. If you have done this, keep the below guidance in mind.

- 🐾 Pre-visit pharmaceuticals (PVPs) may be more important and useful than ever for patients that have veterinary visit anxiety or separation distress.
- 🐾 Personal protective equipment (PPE) may make some dogs more anxious. The novelty of a facemask may frighten some dogs. We know dogs show sensitivity to human facial expressions. So for some dogs, removing a significant component of that expression (the mouth) may cause some disorientation/distress. To mitigate mask apprehension prior to a visit, have owners place a cloth or bandana over their mouth at home and pair it with a positive dog activity (play, treats, etc.). These efforts may desensitize and counter-condition the pet to this novel visual item.
- 🐾 Dogs who are friendly in public places may exhibit aggression when an unfamiliar person approaches or reaches into their car. Avoid reaching into a car to remove a dog.
- 🐾 Dogs may be anxious with an unfamiliar person trying to walk them into a building without an owner. Do not risk them backing out of a loose collar or harness. Every owner should be given a hospital slip leash to place on their dog prior to exiting the car.
- 🐾 Consider having the owner exit the car with the dog on the slip leash and then, maintaining the greatest distance possible, hand over the leash to the staff member wearing appropriate PPE. Handoff at the hospital entrance door may be the most successful strategy for some hospitals/patients.
- 🐾 Remember that dogs will instinctively push against any pressure. If a dog has a collar or slip lead around his neck and he starts to pull away from you, if you continue to pull forward, the dog likely will pull back/resist even more (pulling will backfire!). Practice established Fear Free protocols of using treats and/or gentle encouragement to lure a dog as you move him into and about the hospital.
- 🐾 For some dogs, the operational changes will significantly change their management during their hospital visit, including use of kennels for containment periods. Dogs that suffer from separation distress, separation anxiety, or barrier frustration may struggle with kennel confinement in the hospital. Be cognizant of their emotional status and response to kenneling and make adjustments as necessary to minimize patient distress.