



Dacre House Veterinary Clinic

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Covid Update – July 2021

Since the announcement that most covid restrictions in England will end from Monday 19th July we have put considerable time and thought into a review of our own protocols at Dacre House. This has included careful assessment of the current covid figures in the UK, predictions and forecasts from key opinion leaders, discussions with some of our pet owners and consultation with our staff team.

As may be expected, this has revealed a full spectrum of opinion, with some people keen to return to pre-covid ways immediately and others remaining extremely concerned. Our aim, of course, is to strike a balance between our ongoing mission to provide the best veterinary service we can for the local community against the need to protect our staff and ensure they, and all our pet owners, feel safe at our clinics.

The lifting of the covid regulations comes against the backdrop of a rapidly increasing number of covid cases and the Chief Medical Officer warning of the potential for some hospitals to be overwhelmed once again within 6-8 weeks. Whilst incidents of covid-related serious illness and death are thankfully still in much lower numbers, rising hospital admissions also has implications in the provision of other healthcare, with the NHS still handling a backlog of postponed or delayed treatments.

We, similarly, are working hard to clear a backlog of routine surgeries resulting from restrictions to the services we were able to provide during lockdown and have also been under considerable strain in recent months due to a dramatic increase in pet ownership. As many of you will be aware, we have taken on additional staff, installed additional kennels and opened a second premises in an attempt to relieve these pressures.

The potential to lose staff to self-isolation over the coming weeks is therefore another real concern. With over 500,000 self-isolation alerts in the first week of July, a number of industries are already reporting staff shortages affecting their ability to maintain workflow. At our Southborough clinic in particular, the number of staff we have working in a confined space creates a genuine possibility that the clinic would be forced to close completely for a number of days should a team member test positive and their colleagues advised to self-isolate.

More than half of our staff are still waiting for their second covid vaccination and several team members have a health status that puts them at increased risk should they contract covid.

With all these concerns in mind, we have taken the decision to keep most of our current covid protocols in place for the time being. We believe this is the most responsible approach, to reduce the risks to our staff and help minimise the chance of having to close due to self-isolation. We are aware of the negative impact this has on 'customer experience' but hope our pet owners will see that

it is not a decision which has been taken lightly. We will review our protocols weekly, again taking into account the latest statistics, self-isolation requirements, the opinions (and vaccination status) of our staff and feedback from our pet owners. We hope to be able to gradually relax the protocols week by week.

Rest assured we have every intention of returning to 'normal' service in the future. The current protocols are onerous (particularly for our vets and nurses) and far from ideal for our clients. At the main clinic in Southborough we are acutely aware of the challenges of consulting outside and hugely appreciate the patience, support and understanding which the vast majority of our pet owners have expressed over the last 16 months.

With over 600 visitors to the Southborough clinic each week, the size of the waiting area and consulting rooms and the achievable airflow in these areas does not create a covid-secure environment. The lower visitor numbers and layout at the Pembury clinic causes less concern and these differences are reflected in the protocols in place at each site.

Pembury

- Staff requested to wear facemasks when working within 2m of each other.
- Staff reminded to ensure diligent hygiene with frequent handwashing and regular cleaning of surfaces (particularly high-touch surfaces).
- Visitors requested to wear facemasks when inside the clinic unless unable to for health reasons.
- Visitors requested to use hand sanitiser upon entering the clinic.
- No more than two visitors in the waiting area at any time.
- Only one visitor per patient where possible though exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis at a staff member's discretion with a 'common-sense' approach.
- Visitors to remain in the waiting area rather than accompany their pet into the consulting room though exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis at the vet's discretion with a 'common-sense' approach (examples include euthanasia, confidential discussion or where an animal is better handled with its owner present).
- A lifting of the ban on sharing food with a reminder to follow good hygiene practice.

Southborough

- Staff requested to wear facemasks when working within 2m of each other.
- Staff reminded to ensure diligent hygiene with frequent handwashing and regular cleaning of surfaces (particularly high-touch surfaces).

- Visitors requested to wear facemasks when inside the clinic unless unable to for health reasons.
- Visitors requested to use hand sanitiser upon entering the clinic.
- We will continue to ask visitors to wait outside where possible though exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis at a staff member's discretion with a 'common-sense' approach (examples include visitors who have arrived on foot and need a seat or shelter from the weather) with a limit of two visitors in the waiting area at any time.
- Only one visitor per patient where possible though exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis at a staff member's discretion with a 'common-sense' approach.
- Visitors to remain outside (or, by exception as detailed above, in the waiting area) rather than accompany their pet into the consulting room though exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis at the vet's discretion with a 'common-sense' approach (examples include euthanasia, confidential discussion or where an animal is better handled with its owner present).
- A lifting of the ban on owners visiting in-patients though this should be limited to one owner per animal, a maximum of one visitor at a time and only after 4pm.
- A lifting of the ban on sharing food with a reminder to follow good hygiene practice.
- Abolition of the zoning system whereby team members are restricted to particular areas of the clinic.
- Abolition of the 'pairing' system whereby vets and nurses are restricted to working in their prescribed pairs without additional PPE.