

Veterinary Telemedicine and COVID-19

What is veterinary telemedicine?

Veterinary telemedicine is the remote diagnosis and treatment of an animal using telecommunications technology. This can include the use of phone calls or video calls and can be supported by photos, video recordings and voice recordings.

When can veterinary telemedicine be used?

- For existing, bona-fide clients where the veterinarian is familiar and responsible for the previous and on-going care of the animal(s).
- Triage of an animal in an emergency, prior to organising an in-person veterinary examination. NB an existing bona-fide relationship is not necessary for triaging an emergency.

What type of consult is appropriate for veterinary telemedicine?

This will depend on the individual circumstances, ability of the client to examine and communicate any findings and the nature of the condition presented.

Examples of where telemedicine could be appropriate to reduce social contact during the COVID-19 pandemic are:

- To determine if a vet visit/in-person consultation is required ("appointment triage").
- To monitor an on-going condition which may require a repeat prescription.
- To perform a post-operative check of a surgical wound.
- To determine the need for adjunct veterinary therapies
- To follow-up after a routine procedure/re-check appointment.

A full clinical record of the consult should be kept along with the plan for follow-up and continuity of care. **Vets should familiarise themselves with the policy and guidelines for the relevant Board in their State or Territory prior to commencing veterinary telemedicine.**

Limitations of veterinary telemedicine

In normal clinical practice, vets rely on a complete physical examination to help diagnose and problem solve. They rely on the sights, smells, sounds and feel of their patients to help distinguish abnormal from normal. Veterinary telemedicine does not allow this. The client's ability to examine and relate their findings will vary and vets must determine how reliable this is when deciding on a treatment plan.

Lack of a veterinary examination may lead to an increased risk of error in clinical judgement. If diagnostic tests are required, provision for these must be made in the follow-up appointments.

Veterinary telemedicine could be a useful tool to minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

It does not replace the need for in-person veterinary consultations but could be used to triage appointments so that only those deemed absolutely necessary are conducted face-to-face at this time.

For further details on the full AVA Telemedicine policy visit: <https://www.ava.com.au/policy-advocacy/policies/professional-practices-for-veterinarians/telemedicine-practice/>

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