



OPENING
DOORS



COVID-19

GUIDE FOR RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY MANAGERS

PREPARING THE
RESIDENTS AND
ANIMALS FOR A
SAFER COMMUNITY

COVID-19 Guide for Residential Property Managers Preparing the Residents and Animals for a Safer Community

This guide is intended for all residential property managers to increase the health and safety of communities for people and their pets. The documents are customizable so that you can add your logo and revise the information as appropriate for your community. Keep in mind that anything you implement now to control contagious diseases will continue to serve your property and community in the long term. Your outreach information (the letter and survey) do not need to ask for a specific diagnosis—you are only trying to help residents facing a crisis. Respect privacy but remain accessible so residents feel comfortable sharing their information and needs on a voluntary basis.

During this unprecedented and unpredictable time, it is more important than ever to have the tools in place to protect your community against COVID-19 (coronavirus) and prepare for stay at home orders. The directives to keep people at home means that the role and leadership of residential community managers is at the center of public health so that people stay in their dwelling and get medical treatment if necessary.

Even housing communities that do not allow pets should prepare. Despite no-pet policies, you likely have animals in the community either through reasonable accommodations or residents who have pets against the rules. If you do not already have cleaning supplies, [waste stations](#)* with bags and trash can, and sanitation wipes inside and outside your property, we recommend purchasing and setting these [stations](#)* up as soon as possible.

You can find a sample document with information to collect from every resident (even those without pets) in [Appendix A](#).

While at this time there is [no evidence](#) that pets can spread the infection to people, there are still common-sense steps that property managers and residents can take to reduce the risk in their communities. Although a couple of animals (and only one in the U.S.) have contracted coronavirus, these appear to be isolated cases. As such, there is “[no justification in taking measures against \[pets\] which may compromise their welfare](#)” at this time.

Opening Doors is here to help you navigate through this emergency and we will update this guide upon learning new information.

This document provides the following guidance for residential communities:

- [Implementing a pet forgiveness policy](#)
- [Emergency planning for pet-owners](#)
- [Managing pets for residents in quarantine](#)
- [Helping pet-owning residents who are isolated or hospitalized](#)
- [Guidance for Pet Caretakers of Coronavirus Positive Patients](#)
- [Sample guidelines for interacting with pets](#)

*Note: Opening Doors does not endorse nor guarantee any products or vendors listed on this page nor can we be responsible for problems that arise from engaging with any of these companies.

Implementing a Pet Forgiveness Policy

This is not the time to punish for infractions – whether the resident is harboring a pet in violation of breed, weight, size, species, no-pet or other policies in place. It is better to create a “forgiveness policy” during this crisis and sort through the consequences once the emergency has passed.

A forgiveness policy is necessary because you need a full accounting of everyone in the building to best manage the spread of COVID-19. Residents often hide in the shadows to avoid being caught if they are violating a pet policy. This can impact a resident’s participation in any safety protocols, particularly with reporting any illness or allowing management to access a dwelling.

Moreover, a forgiveness policy means that the resident will still be able to provide necessary care for their pet. With instructions to stay at home, the ability to order food and other essential supplies online is the best way to keep people out of the stores. However, a resident may fear ordering supplies online in fear that if management sees a “Chewy” box or a package from another pet care delivery company it will raise suspicions. If you want to reduce viral spread in your community, help your residents get past these barriers.

Further, pets are a key player in helping defeat coronavirus by providing a vital public health tool to keep the infection from spreading. Physical distancing is crucial for attacking this virus, but the inability to have social contact can be overbearing for many people. In fact, such social isolation poses a [major risk to physical and mental health](#) that is similar to that of “[obesity, smoking, lack of access to care and physical inactivity](#).” Pets are an important source of [companionship](#) that help stave off the effects of isolation and incentivize people to stay home. You may see that people without pets are lonelier and more likely to leave the house while those who can snuggle at home with a furry friend observe physical distancing.

If your building does not allow pets, this is a great time to start. Animal shelters are in [need of fosters](#) to temporarily house their animals more than ever, and with residents home-bound this is an opportune time to dip your toes into pet-inclusive housing. Buildings that require spay and neuter for all animals should make an exception during this time. With the dire national shortage of personal protective equipment, animal welfare organizations nationwide have temporarily stopped performing spay and neuter surgeries. Contact your [local animal welfare organization](#) for more information and targeted support in managing a foster program in your community.

A true forgiveness plan means that residents with pets in violation of the lease will be allowed to keep their pet once life gets back to normal. Again, residents who have been successfully harboring a pet illegally are not going to reveal themselves if they are still faced with a choice of losing their housing or their pet. Consider imposing a small penalty on delinquents and enacting a grandfather clause that permits only pets currently living in the building moving forward. Note, that you do not need to allow a pet who poses a direct threat to the health and safety of others. In that instance you should contact your local animal control.

You can find a sample pet forgiveness letter in [Appendix B](#).

Emergency Planning for Pet Owners

While it is always important to have emergency information – such as vaccination history, spay/neuter status, microchip number, veterinarian contact information – on hand, it is critical during physical distancing. Should a resident become seriously ill, you will be able to contact the pet’s guardian and not have to contend with determining what to do with the animals. If pets are well accounted for, it makes the resident more likely to accept having to leave. Moreover, you will have the information to keep your community safe if an animal gets lost or has an incident with another person or animal.

It may not be possible to collect all the information and documents at this time, but at minimum you should require an emergency contact and vaccination records.

You can find a sample document with information to collect from all residents who are living with pets in [Appendix C](#).

Managing Pets for Residents in Quarantine

While our understanding of the virus is frequently changing, at this time there is still **no indication** that animals can spread the virus to others.

Regardless, **experts** recommend that those who are symptomatic or in quarantine limit **contact** with pets in the same manner as they would with people. Ideally, someone else in the household should care for the pet.

While it will be helpful if any resident who has been exposed to or has symptoms of the virus immediately contacts management, speak with your attorney to determine your confidentiality responsibilities before enacting any reporting policy. Residents should know that they can contact you voluntarily if they need any kind of assistance with their pet during this time. This is when you can employ the network you have developed among all the residents. Once you know the needs, contact those who have indicated that they can help and connect them with the resident.

If an infected person's animal needs veterinary care, another household member should call the veterinarian and ask about their protocol. Many veterinarians are adjusting their operations to continue to serve clients and pets while observing distancing precautions.

For individuals who are not sick or symptomatic, it is best to limit interactions with pets that are not their own and always wash their hands before and after interacting with any pet. This especially applies to community staff, who are likely familiar with residents' dogs and have treats in the office. Until this particular pandemic is cleared, **NO TREATS** for residents' dogs, and **NO TOUCHING** of residents' pets.

Helping Pet-Owning Residents Who Are Isolated or Hospitalized

A scenario that must be avoided is a resident refusing to get medical care because there is no one left to care for the pet.

Residents who are isolated and do not have anyone to care for their pet should be encouraged to connect with management immediately and communicate their current or potential pet needs. This is another situation when having a network of volunteer helpers in the building will be a helpful resource for residents. This service would be a generous amenity for residents at any time. Surgeries, family emergencies, and other life events cause residents to need a helping hand. Consider a more permanent “good neighbors” list, managed by you or by a volunteer in the community.

If a resident needs to be admitted to a care facility or otherwise cannot be in the unit, the resident should connect with the emergency contact who will care for or temporarily foster the animal, contact management, and inform management whether the emergency contact will care for the pet or whether the assistance network should be activated. If the individual fails or is unable to do so, you should connect with the emergency contact to apprise the individual of the situation.

Connect with your [local animal shelter or animal control](#) now for the protocol to retrieve a pet from an infected resident’s dwelling as well as a protocol if there is no one available to care for the pet should the resident need to leave the unit. Having this information ahead of time will help your operations run smoothly should you encounter these emergencies.

Guidance for Pet Caretakers of Coronavirus Positive Patients

The following advice comes directly from Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program at Cornell and is based on current knowledge and research and the CDC's interim recommendations for caring for pets of COVID-19 positive owners.

The full list of recommendations can be found here:

<http://blogs.cornell.edu/cornellsheltermedicine/2020/04/05/guidance-for-caretakers-for-pets-of-covid-19-positive-patients/>

Coronavirus Positive Pet Owners Likely Have the Following Options:

- The pet can stay in its own home and [a neighbor or other caretaker] can care for it there (ideal for cats, small mammals primarily)
- The pet may be taken to [a foster's] home and cared for there
- The pet may be able to go to a boarding facility

Providing care for a pet in the owner's home

- Ensure that heating and cooling will remain on to provide a safe and comfortable temperature.
- If at all possible, [the foster] should avoid entering the home.
- For cats, simply slipping a few days' worth of food/water/litter through the door from outside will likely be sufficient.
- For dogs who are easy to handle, food and water may be slipped through the door from outside. The dog can be leashed as he comes to the door for a walk a few times a day and then placed back in the home without entering.
- For fish, some reptiles and small mammals, care may not need to be feed as frequently, or could be provided a long-lasting food source, reducing the frequency of care visits.
- For some dogs and other pets, it may be simpler to take them home or to a boarding kennel.
- If [an individual is] planning to take the animal home... it is recommended to wait until at least 3 days have passed with no one living in the home, if possible; most of the virus present will have died during that time. If in-home care can be continued for 14 days (through the CDC recommended period for animals to be kept separate), or until the owner is able to resume care, that is ideal.
- Exposure to the virus can be mitigated by following the measures to prevent exposure.

Measures to prevent exposure

- For every visit use proper PPE: wear gloves, mask, and coveralls or additional piece(s) of clothing worn over your existing clothes that can be shed and placed in a bag to be washed once you leave the home. Shoe covers or another clean pair of shoes to put on before going home is advised.

- Though the risk from animals is negligible, it is still recommended to minimize close contact (snuggling, licking, etc.) for 14 days based on CDC recommendations.
- Sanitize doorknobs and other surfaces [the foster will] be contacting frequently with disinfectant wipes or sprays.
- After [the foster] leave[s] the home and before [the foster] leave[s] or contact[s] [the] car, sanitize any items [the individual is] taking with [him or her] (for example, leash, food container, carrier). Remove shoe covers or change shoes. Carefully remove all PPE and place them in large plastic bags: one to be discarded and the other to be laundered or sanitized. Alternatively, if...returning to the home, can leave coveralls, extra shoes, and gloves at the entry to the home. Sanitize hands frequently by hand washing or alcohol gel, including immediately following the removal of gloves.

Retrieving a pet from an owner's home

- Check with the local health departments and/or [the] animal control agency for specific recommendations and potentially assistance in getting the animal. If at all possible...avoid entering the home.
- If the animal can be passed...without contact through the use of a carrier or by securely tying the dog's leash, this is the best means of taking the animal from someone else.
- Minimize time in the home and avoid contact with household items.
- Once outside, sanitize the surface of pet care supplies [the foster is] taking ([such as] leashes, bowls, food containers, etc.) using disinfecting wipes or sprays before removing PPE. Place washable items belonging to the pet into the bag with [the] washable PPE.

Caring for an exposed pet in the foster's home

- Although it is theoretically possible for the pet to be carrying some viral particles on their fur, the AVMA and CDC agree that fur is highly unlikely to be a means of spreading the virus. These overly cautious steps will further minimize any chance of cross-contamination and exposure to a household
- [The home should have] a separate space [for] the animal. This should be an area that is easily disinfected and contains limited household items.
- Minimize interaction with multiple family members.
- Any carriers or other items that came with the animal should be thoroughly cleaned with disinfectant or run through the laundry if applicable.
- It is good general practice at any time to wash...hands after contact with an animal or their food, waste, or bedding.

Dogs

- If the dog is amenable, a thorough bath is advised, with attention to the paws, head, face, neck, and shoulders. Wear PPE while bathing the pet, including eye protection. Any type of pet shampoo or liquid dish soap is appropriate, being sure to rinse completely.

- Consider separating the pet from close contact with other pets and people for 14 days. [This is] being overly cautious, but this echoes the recommendations from the CDC regarding separation of exposed pets from close contact with people for 14 days.
 - Do not bring items (other than medications and food in a closed container) from the home with you unless you can wash them immediately (beds, blankets, toys, even the leash).
- Cats**
- Bathing cats is not recommended at this time as they typically groom themselves which helps to eliminate any viral particles on their coat.
 - Once in your home [keep] the cat separate from other pets [as much as possible] to avoid sharing litterboxes and to provide less stress on the cat. Close contact should be minimal for 14 days, and litterboxes cleaned frequently.



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