Covid19 Shelter Vet Summary of Recommended Procedures

Introduction:
There are differences between providing veterinary care in a shelter environment compared to primary care veterinary practice. The challenges that shelters face include:

High risk environment:
From a disease perspective shelters are a high-risk environment with multiple animals kept in a relatively small area. Resistant viruses such as canine parvovirus and feline panleucopaenia are a constant and particular worry. An outbreak of disease at this time would put vets and VNs at greater risk due to the intensive treatment required to deal with such diseases. In addition there are particular welfare risks for animals in a shelter setting if the staffing at the shelter is restricted due to Covid19

Mental health / wellbeing of staff
Staff working in shelters are often under a lot of strain, caring for as many animals as possible. The loss of animals from (vaccine) preventable diseases will add to that strain, as is the possibility of increased euthanasia due to the reduction in available treatment options. An inability or reduction in the ability to rehome, with the possibility of increased intake may further add to this.

Herd Health
We need to consider the health of the animals on site as a whole (herd health) in addition to individual animals.

What are considered essential welfare treatments in the shelter?

- To be provided remotely where possible.
- The frequency of shelter visits to be agreed between the vet and the shelter.
- Plan to batch treatments and checks together
- Ensure SOPs are in place to maximise social distancing to protect vet and shelter staff
- Where individual animals are brought to the surgery ensure the practice SOPs are shared

Health checks

- A full health check will be required at some point during the animal’s shelter stay
- Early checks will be beneficial for animals where there are welfare concerns and particularly where euthanasia may be required
- Follow up checks in many cases can be performed remotely

Vaccinations: consider whether these can be prescribed remotely and administered by a competent member of staff (in which case a healthcare record rather than a vaccination certificate will be completed).

- Puppy and kitten vaccination to receive a full course, 2nd vacc can be prescribed remotely
- Adult animals to receive a single injection as a minimum.
- Where a full course can not be given but the adoption goes ahead liaise with the shelter to ensure adoptor understands risks and the need for further injections

Neutering

- Animals may need to be rehomed unneutered with an agreement in place, this is suitable for dogs/ strictly indoor cats.
Neutering of cats and rabbits encouraged to minimise population issues and problems such as males spraying. Use staff “teams” and try to plan neuters alongside other more urgent procedures so staff are not coming in solely to neuter where possible.

Euthanasia

- The vet has a critical role to play in euthanasia decision making in a shelter setting to ensure animal welfare. This is likely to be especially critical during the Covid19 period.
- There may be circumstances where transportation to the practice is not possible

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