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**SAFETY PROCEDURES, AND PERSONAL PROTECTION GUIDELINES FOR  
VETERINARY PHYSIOTHERAPY PROFESSIONALS COVID -19**

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## 1. Introduction:

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is a respiratory disease caused by COVID-19 virus. Given the extension of Lockdown and the general consensus of the SAAPRA community it has been deemed necessary for our profession to practice to some extent in order to support Animals who may require Veterinary Physiotherapy at this time. This will place Veterinary Physiotherapists at the front line of the outbreak and as such are exposed to hazards that put them at risk of infection with an outbreak pathogen (in this case COVID-19). Hazards include pathogen exposure, psychological distress, etc. This document highlights the rights and responsibilities of the Veterinary Physiotherapist including specific measures needed to protect occupational safety and health.

## 2. Risk of Infection:

The World Health Organization has advocated basic measures for individuals to follow to reduce their risk of contracting COVID-19 such as:

- a.) Frequent hand Washing with alcohol-based soaps and hand sanitizer.
- b.) Correct Coughing and sneezing techniques.
- c.) Avoiding Contact with Sick Individuals.

## 3. Classifying Worker Exposure to COVID-19:

Veterinary Physiotherapists are classified as the following:

**Medium exposure risk jobs** include those that require frequent and/or close contact with (i.e. within 2 meters of) people who may be infected with COVID-19, but who are not known or suspected COVID-19 patients. In areas without ongoing community transmission, workers in this risk group may have frequent contact with travelers who may return from international locations with widespread COVID-19 transmission. In areas where there is ongoing community transmission, workers in this category may have contact with the general public (e.g. in schools, high-population-density work environments, such as labor centers, consulting rooms, point of entry personnel and some high-volume retail settings).

**Lower Exposure Risk (Caution)** Lower exposure risk (caution) jobs are those that do not require contact with people known to be, or suspected of being infected with COVID-19, nor frequent close contact with (i.e. within 2 meter of) the general public. Workers in this category have minimal occupational contact with the public and other co-workers.

#### **4. Implementing Workplace Controls:**

The legislation governing workplaces in relation to COVID – 19 is the Occupational Health and Safety Act, Act 85 of 1993, as amended, read with the Hazardous Biological Agents Regulations. Section 8 (1) of the Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Act, Act 85 of 1993, as amended, requires the employer to provide and maintain as far as is reasonably practicable a working environment that is safe and without risks to the health of employees. Specifically, section 8(2)(b) requires steps such as may be reasonably practicable to eliminate or mitigate any hazard or potential hazard before resorting to personal protective equipment (PPE). However, in the case of COVID–19, a combination of controls is required, although the main principle is to follow the hierarchy of controls. However, before the implementation of control measures, current risk assessments need to be reviewed and updated, taking into account the new hazards posed by exposure to COVID- 19 in the workplace. This is in accordance with Section 8 (2) (d) of the OHS Act.

##### **4.1 Engineering Controls**

These involve isolating employees from work-related hazards. In workplaces where they are appropriate, these types of controls reduce exposure to hazards without relying solely on worker behavior and can be the most cost-effective solution to implement.

- a.) Installing high-efficiency air filters (not to be relied on as the most appropriate in isolation of other controls).
- b.) Increasing ventilation rates in the work environment.
- c.) Installing physical barriers such as face shields.
- d.) Specialized negative pressure ventilation in some settings (e.g. airborne infection isolation rooms in healthcare settings and autopsy rooms in mortuary settings).

##### **4.2 Administrative Controls**

Require action by the employee and employer. Typically, administrative controls are changes in work policy or procedures to reduce or minimize exposure to a hazard. Examples of administrative controls for COVID-19 include:

- a.) Pre-screening of clients to determine risk level.
- b.) Encouraging sick workers to stay at home.
- c.) Minimizing contact among workers, clients, and customers by replacing face-to-face meetings with virtual communications e.g. conference calls, Skype, etc.
- d.) Minimizing the number of workers on site at any given time e.g. rotation or shift work.
- e.) Discontinuing nonessential local and international travel. Regularly check travel advice from the Department of Health at: [www.health.gov.za](http://www.health.gov.za).
- f.) Developing emergency communications plans, including a task team for answering workers' concerns and internet-based communications, if feasible.

- g.) Providing workers with up-to-date education and training on COVID-19 risk factors and protective behaviors (e.g. cough etiquette and care of PPE).
  - h.) Training workers who need to use protective clothing and equipment on how to put it on, use/wear it and take it off correctly, including, in the context of their current and potential duties. Training material should be easy to understand and available in the appropriate language and literacy level for all workers.
  - i.) Please see attached examples of Triage Questionnaires for use before consultation is considered by the veterinary Physiotherapist.
- 1.1. Physiotherapy Patient Triage Tool Pets.
  - 1.2. Physiotherapy Patient Triage Tool Equine

### **SafeWork Practices:**

#### *Veterinary Physiotherapy Practice Recommended Protocols:*

There is a continuing infection rate. It is necessary to ensure correct measures are put in place in order to ensure the safety of both Veterinary therapists, Staff, and Clients.

#### *Further Veterinary Physiotherapy Measures to be taken during practice:*

- a.) Avoiding direct Contact with Owners of Patients. Maintaining a 2m distance from an owner.
- b.) Removing Halter/collar/ Lead that the patient has arrived with and placing your lead/collar/Halter on the patient.
- c.) It is not recommended to have Owners enter therapy rooms unless deemed absolutely necessary.  
For Example: Owners who have particularly aggressive dogs or particularly anxious patients. In this case it is important to have necessary Safety attire: Facemask for owner and therapist. Face shield or goggles for the therapist. Should a client not have a facemask, one should be provided to them.
- d.) Caution in assessment for treatment areas during home visits is very important. Recommended Treatment areas: Outdoors. An area away from the owner or at least maintaining a safe distance.
- e.1) When visiting a stable yard: Own Halter is recommended and a safe distance from any person present. It is also recommended that the patient is stabled before the therapist arrives, so as to minimize the area the Physiotherapist should move around in and limit the duration of time the Physiotherapist spends at the yard.
- e.2) The Veterinary physiotherapist should have a sanitizing protocol in place for equipment used. It is recommended that this protocol is in written form that can be produced on request.
- f.) Assume overall responsibility to ensure that all necessary preventive and protective measures are taken to minimize occupational safety and health risks:
  - provide information, instruction and training on occupational safety and health;

- training on infection prevention and control (IPC); and use of, putting on, taking off and disposal of personal protective equipment (PPE);
  - provide adequate IPC and PPE supplies (masks, gloves, goggles, gowns, hand sanitizer, soap and water, cleaning supplies) in sufficient quantity to staff;
  - including implementation of occupational safety and health management systems to identify hazards and assess risks to health and safety; infection prevention and control (IPC) measures; zero-tolerance;
  - expenses for occupational safety and health requirements;
  - familiarize personnel with technical updates on COVID-19 and provide appropriate tools to assess, triage, test and treat patients and to share infection prevention and control information with patients and the public;
  - advise workers on self-assessment, symptom reporting and staying home when ill;
  - maintain appropriate working hours with breaks;
  - consult with health workers on occupational safety and health aspects of their work;
  - not be required to return to a work situation where there is continuing or serious danger to life or health, until the employer has taken any necessary remedial action;
  - allow workers to exercise the right to remove themselves from a work situation that they have reasonable justification to believe presents an imminent and serious danger to their life or health. When a Veterinary Physiotherapist or Assistant exercises this right, they shall be protected from any undue consequences;
  - honor the right to compensation, rehabilitation and curative services if infected with COVID-19 following exposure in the workplace. This would be considered occupational exposure and resulting illness would be considered an occupational disease;
  - enable co-operation between management and workers and/or their representatives.
- g.) Avoid contact with payment methods: Recommended route of payment: EFT, and other “Contactless” methods available.
- h.) Hand Washing and Sanitizing frequently. Suggested to demonstrate a “hand washing protocol” in each Veterinary Physiotherapy Practice.

### **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

Engineering and administrative controls are considered more effective in minimizing exposure to COVID-19. PPE may also be needed to prevent certain exposures. While correctly using PPE can help prevent some exposures, it should not take the place of other prevention strategies.

Examples of PPE include: gloves, goggles, face shields, face masks, gowns, aprons, coats, overalls, hair and shoe covers and respiratory protection, when appropriate. All types of PPE must be:

- 1.) Properly fitted.
- 2.) Consistently and properly worn when required.
- 3.) Regularly inspected, maintained, and replaced, as necessary.
- 4.) Properly removed, cleaned, and stored or disposed of, as applicable, to avoid contamination of self, others, or the environment.

Employers are obligated to provide their workers with PPE needed to keep them safe while performing their duties.

When a Veterinary Physiotherapist is in Contact with an Owner it is Necessary to wear PPE as Follows: Mask over Mouth and Nose. Face shield recommended. This will also aid in preventing the therapist from touching their face. It is also required that the Owner wears a mask over mouth and Nose if attending the therapy session.

**5. Further Information:**

[www.health.gov.za](http://www.health.gov.za) in the case of suspected exposure contact the coronavirus hotline in South Africa: **0800 02 9999**.

South African Vet Council: <https://www.savc.org.za/> **012 3456360**.

**6. Acknowledgements:**

The National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) provides the latest <http://www.nicd.ac.za/diseases-a-z-index/covid-19/covid-19-communication-resources/>

On the link provided above, click on COVID-19 Technical Resources for more information on the COVID-19.

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