

It is important to check with your state and local authorities to see if they are making recommendations that impact your clinic operations. Many are recommending non-essential surgeries be put on hold so make sure you know what government agencies are requiring —including what they define as non-essential — when deciding to remain open and limit appointments or to suspend all services.

How will you know when, or if, it's time to close?

If your clinic is attached to a shelter and the shelter closes to the public, odds are you will not have the option of continuing to stay open to the public. You may still be able to do pre-adoption surgeries of shelter pets or, in cases where shelters are continuing to allow adoptions via email with curbside pick-up, perform spay/neuter on those animals.

Alternatively, your clinic and the shelter may decide to stop surgery at the time of adoptions and provide vouchers for the pet to be brought back another time or foster to adopt. [The University of Wisconsin has put out this recommendation for shelters doing spay/neuter: https://uwsheltermedicine.com/news/2020/3/covid-19-response-limiting-non-emergency-surgery-in-shelters-and-spay-neuter-clinics](https://uwsheltermedicine.com/news/2020/3/covid-19-response-limiting-non-emergency-surgery-in-shelters-and-spay-neuter-clinics)

National Animal Control Association (NACA) just released this statement on Releasing Unaltered Pets from Animal Shelters During the COVID-19 Pandemic www.nacanet.org/covid-19/

For clinics that are not affiliated with shelters, the decision to close or stay open can be a tough one. These guidelines can help you navigate the pros and cons of each option by asking yourself if your choice;

1. Jeopardizes the health of your staff, clients and volunteers?
2. Jeopardizes the health of your patients?
3. Is socially responsible?

Hear what other clinics are doing. Sign up [here](#) to join upcoming daily calls with other clinics to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on spay/neuter clinics for as long as they are needed. It is hosted by Clinic HQ, but any clinic can join, you do not need to be a Clinic HQ clinic. <https://calendly.com/hq-u/coronavirus?month=2020-03>

For spay/neuter clinics making the difficult decision to close:

1. You will no doubt be worried about your staff going unpaid for an unknown time period. Consider reaching out to local shelters and emergency clinics that may be staying open

and offer to keep paying your skilled team to assist at those organizations. You will need to work out details, but this could be a way to benefit both organizations.

- a. Explore lines of credit or small business loans so you can cover payroll. The US Small Business Administration is offering low-interest disaster loans - <https://www.sba.gov/disaster-assistance/coronavirus-covid-19>
 - b. Community foundations around the country are offering funds to help a variety of individuals and businesses impacted by CORVID-19. You can find the list here: <https://www.commfoundations.com/blog/2020/3/11/community-foundations-nationwide-launch-efforts-to-help-communities-affected-by-the-coronavirus>
 - c. Ask for donations. While this is a hard time for everyone and many people can't give, those who can want to help. You can craft a message asking for sponsors for spay/neuters or emergency procedures for clients who simply don't have the financial resources at this challenging time.
2. Check your state's guidelines related to short-term disability and unemployment insurance and advise your employees when they can file for such support. (Unfortunately, this does not extend to independent contractors such as relief veterinarians.)
 3. Monitor what Congress's coronavirus relief bill will offer individuals and businesses.
 4. Try to give yourself enough time before closing to contact every client with an appointment on the books and let them know you will reschedule as soon as you can.
 - a. Have a plan for how to handle rechecks even if closed. Consider the use of a telemedicine app where you can connect with your patients on-line.
 5. Keep clients up to date via your website and social media sites as to an expected re-open date or to watch there for news and post there periodically.
 6. Consider sharing some spay/neuter information or memes on social media and ask people to commit to getting their pets fixed at your clinic when you re-open or to share information about helping community cats in their neighborhood. With so many people home this is a great time to ask people to share information.

For spay/neuter clinics staying open

1. Take steps to limit direct contact between your staff and clients, such as having them fill out forms online. If you use Clinic HQ, they can set you up with a paperless system or

you can pre-fill out health questions and e-signing consents online. (don't know how? Ask Clinic HQ gclimmer@clinichq.com)

2. If you don't have online capabilities, you can still reduce direct contact. A simple solution is to have people bring their own pen to fill in paperwork or let them sign with a stylus (to minimize touching the screen) on a tablet in the parking lot, then the stylus is sterilized between each client. This is using HQ "instant sign" option. As soon as owner signed, forms can be printed in clinic. The stylus' were ordered via Amazon. You can order a [ten pack here](#).
3. Ask people to pay by credit card either online or over the phone. If your staff must handle cash, they should wear gloves, though you don't need to deplete your supply of exam gloves. Be creative and use household cleaning gloves or even plastic bags.
4. No matter how you manage paperwork and payment, keep everyone as safe as possible by practicing social distancing. Conduct intake procedures in the parking lot and having staff take pets inside for the owners so they don't even need to enter the building. Also have staff bring the pet outside to their owner during release. One clinic used a number system where they laminated numbered pages and put it on their windshield. A various of this is using sticky notes with numbers written and putting in under the windshield wiper .Or use an app like Waitlist Me or TablesReady and have people wait in their vehicles until they are notified it's time for their pet.
5. Ask people to make appointments via phone or your online scheduling (if you have it) to avoid in person scheduling.
6. Lock your lobby during the day and put up a sign that you are only open during intake and release of patients.
7. Limit the use of owner items being left in the clinic or handled by staff. Replace leashes with slip leads from the clinic and don't allow the public to include blankets or toys with their pets.
8. Communicate specific post-op directions via text or email and consider adding a link to your website with instructions and a post- surgery video. Here is a sample video you may use: <https://www.aspcapro.org/resource/post-op-instructions-spayneuter-clinics>.
9. Even if you stay open, your clinic doesn't need to keep a full schedule. Prioritize emergency surgeries such as pyometras or dystocias or vaginal prolapses.

10. Convert vaccine/wellness services to a drive-through system. Pima Animal Services and Clinic HQ software both have great ideas on how to implement this. Email gcllemmer@clinichq.com for more info.
11. If you have an online pharmacy, recommend that clients use it rather than getting medications directly from the clinic (if there is enough time to wait before starting meds).
12. Deep clean the entire clinic using CDC guidelines; require staff and encourage clients to frequently wash their hands and avoid shaking hands or otherwise touching people unnecessarily.
 - a. Virox, which manufactures Rescue, is working to make sure that any backlogs on orders are temporary. The company hosted a webinar about what you need to know about cleaning in facilities where animals are housed and cared-for: <https://hubs.ly/H0nD8bk0>

What are clinics doing to modify the structure of their staffing to socially distance?

*Some are sending administrative staff home to work from home. From home they can make and approve appointments and take payments via online payment apps such as MX Merchant. One clinic doing this said nearly all owners were appreciative and will to pre-pay.

*Some are staggering their shifts so the same group of people work together all the time and there are less people together at the same time.