



National Animal Care & Control Association

40960 California Oaks Rd. #242

Murrieta, CA 92562

(913) 768-1319

naca@nacanet.org

www.nacanet.org

NACA Statement on Essential Animal Services During COVID-19

Recently, NACA released a statement asserting that animal services should be considered essential public service, and therefore both animal control and shelter operations should continue throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, NACA has received requests for more information and clarification about what services may and may not be considered essential.

Essential services are those which are necessary for the functioning of the animal services agency. They protect human health and safety; maintain lifesaving; and ensure shelters do not become overcrowded which will lead to additional risks for people who have to continue to care for those animals housed in the institutional setting of the shelter during the COVID-19 pandemic

Even during these unprecedented times, people care deeply about homeless and stray animals and will act to save animals' lives. The following list of essential and non-essential services are intended to serve as guidelines for most organizations. Ultimately, individual agencies and communities must make decisions based on their own laws, ordinances and internal decision-making processes. All shelters and rescues should first and foremost follow guidelines from the CDC and their own state and local government agencies.

Goals of maintaining performance of essential animal services during COVID-19:

1. Help shelters maintain a slow and steady flow of animals in and out of the shelter system, with a focus on responding to emergency field and intake needs, providing emergency care for sick and injured animals, and quickly placing incoming animals into foster or adoptive homes.
2. Minimize risk to staff, volunteers and the public by suspending all services that do not directly contribute to emergency rescue, intake and care of pets in immediate need or placement of those animals in temporary or permanent homes.
3. Operate the shelter as a disaster/emergency response center, while managing most pets in foster care, essentially turning the entire community into an animal shelter.

Essential services include:

Information, support and expertise for the community related to pets

Social media, new releases and public information about animals during COVID-19

Volunteer services, when volunteers are central to performing essential operations

Intake services: Intake of pets who truly need shelter services including:

- Sick and injured animals



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- Surrendered pets who have no other viable options and cannot remain sheltered where they live or elsewhere in the community
- Telephone triage for various types of calls to determine urgency and pathway of animals
- Intake of dogs that pose a threat to public safety

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Essential services continued:

Animal Care

- Emergency medical care for sheltered and incoming pets
- Medical care required to maintain the health of sheltered pets
- Routine care of sheltered pets to maintain health of animals

Animal Control and Outreach Services

- Animal control dispatch services
- Animal control priority calls including:
 - Cruelty and neglect
 - Public safety calls including bite complaints, dangerous animals and rabies concerns
 - Law enforcement assistance
 - Animals in immediate danger for any reason
 - Impounding pets of sick or deceased people
 - Hoarding case response where pets are in immediate danger
- Disaster relief efforts including food and supply delivery
- Pet support services to help pet owners in crisis

Outcomes

- Return of found stray pets to their owners
- Foster and adoption placement of sheltered pets to prevent overcrowding



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- Volunteer services in cases where volunteers contribute to essential functions of organization
- Transport/transfer in cases where shelters will become above critical capacity without these services

Non-essential services, while they may be critically important under normal operating conditions, are not necessary in this immediate moment, as shelters across the country reduce services to protect workers and the public, conserve precious medical supplies, and minimize the spread of COVID-19. These non-essential services include:

- Training, events, gatherings
- In-person pet licensing (online or phone options should be considered)
- Spay and neuter services for community and shelter pets
- Community outreach
- Community medical or microchip clinics
- Trapping of companion or wildlife animals that are not public safety concerns
- TNR/SNR
- Intake of healthy cats and kittens
- Pick up and/or intake of healthy, friendly stray animals who are not in immediate danger

Conclusion: Animal Services should be considered an essential public service. We must strive to protect companion animals' lives as a means to protecting public safety while ensuring those pursuits are not posing undue risks. Again, these recommendations are intended as guidelines for most organizations. NACA recognizes that all communities are unique and what may be safe and feasible for one community may not be for another.