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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Why the Delay in Veterinary Care?

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Since the beginning of the pandemic, pet owners have noticed that it is taking longer to get appointments at their veterinarians for well visits, surgeries, and even urgent cases. Appointments that could usually have been scheduled in a week now have to wait for 2 or more at times. What in the world is going on?

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, although many people adopted new pets during the CoVID pandemic in 2020, the number was actually at a 5-year low. However, there were enough new pets combined with the demand back log for existing clients that has driven the demand for veterinary services.

When the pandemic first hit, many clinics closed, or saw only emergencies in the spring of 2020. This created a logjam in demand for services. As front-line workers, practices had to adopt changes related to deep cleaning after every appointment, transitioning to curbside care, and often, splitting the staff into rotating teams which contributed to scheduling and efficiency challenges. All of this takes extra time, so veterinarians were not able to see as many appointments in a day. Add to that trying to help see other clinics' urgent cases when they were not open and the emergency clinics were overwhelmed, and it means a longer wait for clients.

Before the rapid test, if an employee had or was suspected to have/been exposed to CoVID, they had to stay home for several days at the direction of the state and national medical advisors while awaiting results. In fact, many clinics are still seeing cases of CoVID which makes them even more short staffed. This, a higher work load, and less efficiency has led to increased

stress levels experienced by veterinarians and support staff. This in turn leads to compassion fatigue, burn out and high levels of staff turnover in both general practice and emergency practices. The veterinary profession is facing staff shortages, just like many other businesses and in our profession, there is significant training that needs to be undertaken to be a receptionist, technician, or assistant.

We understand the frustration of not always being able to have your pet seen immediately, and veterinarians are working extra hard to try to meet the increased demand and continue to provide the best care for your pets. We truly want to help you and your pets: it is just that we can only do so much with the limited doctors and support staff that we have. Your patience and kindness during these busy times is much appreciated. Please understand that when you call, the receptionists and other support staff care deeply about your pet and want to help you. It is not a matter of 'squeezing you in' where they can—there are often literally no more slots for the doctors to do this and there are limited human resources.

So, what can you do to help out? First of all, plan your yearly exams or new animal exams well in advance. Keep your pets on the recommended flea and tick and heartworm preventative to help eliminate these parasite infestations and the associated skin and tick diseases associated with them. When you see you are getting low on a medication that your pet needs every day, call *at least* 3 days in advance, to give the clinic time to get the refill ready. If you have concerns about your pet, call us as soon as possible as it may take time to get an appointment scheduled. If your pet gets better before the appointment- please call us as soon as possible to cancel the appointment: so that the appointment time can be used for another animal. Be aware that the animal emergency clinics, just as human ERs will triage patients and the critical cases will get priority.

We are all in this together and we thank you for your patience and kindness while we continue to work to provide you and your pets with the best medical care.

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The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA) is a professional organization of 380 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine.