

News & Reports

EMS to stop during coronavirus outbreak

By Josh Loeb

THE RCVS has announced the temporary suspension of all extramural studies (EMS) requirements for vet students in response to the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

Under normal circumstances, vet students would be required to complete a minimum of 38 weeks of EMS throughout their degree programme to gain real-life work experience to enhance their university-based studies.

However, following a teleconference between the Veterinary Schools Council and the RCVS last week, proposals to grant 'flexibility' around completion of EMS were emailed to members of RCVS council and were approved.

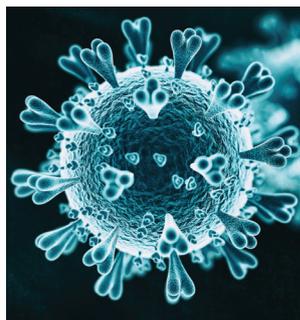
Now, in light of the evolving Covid-19 situation, students no longer have to undertake EMS over the next eight weeks, after which the

situation will be reviewed. The suspension of EMS requirements applies to all students – regardless of their year of study.

Furthermore, for students in their final year who may now find it difficult to make up any missing EMS before graduation, any shortfall in EMS of up to four weeks' duration relative to the normal requirements 'should not be a barrier' to completion of their degree programme.

Vet schools have been told to continue to support students and explore alternatives for final-year students' EMS placements.

For students in earlier years of their studies, it is expected that there will be sufficient time for them to make up the full 38 weeks of EMS required to complete their degree programme. However, this



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will be reviewed as the situation progresses.

The move follows a letter sent last week by RCVS president Niall Connell to all vets and vet nurses to acknowledge that they may be required to depart from normal veterinary guidance because of the 'exceptional circumstances' engendered by the outbreak. Safeguarding human life must be prioritised, the RCVS has made clear.

In a statement sent to all UK vet schools, Connell wrote this week: 'The health and safety of students and staff are paramount.'

- *Vet Record* is to trial virtual EMS placements for all UK vet students throughout the Covid-19 outbreak. If you are interested, send an email with 'virtual EMS placement' in the subject bar to gill.harris@bmj.com. Ideally, tell us what you are interested in researching and writing about.

IN OTHER COVID-19 NEWS

- The RCVS has published a list of frequently asked questions, and accompanying answers relating to Covid-19's impact on the profession. It can be found at <https://bit.ly/2TU46eV>.
- The National Office of Animal Health confirmed that supplies of veterinary medicines are so far not affected by the crisis. This reassurance followed concerns from some vets that supplies could be affected. BVA past president Robin Hargreaves called on all veterinary colleagues to behave responsibly, writing on Twitter that his own practice, Stanley House Vets, 'will not be stockpiling, but we will be limiting supply to clients. Wholesalers should do the same. I hope colleagues will behave similarly.'
- The Animal Medicines Training Regulatory Authority (AMTRA) has warned Britain's farmers to avoid stockpiling prescription-only

animal medicines – something that would be 'both illegal and counterproductive'. AMTRA's secretary general Stephen Dawson told farmers: 'Stocking up with prescription-only medicines such as wormers and flukicides is not appropriate, whether due to coronavirus or any other reasons. These medicines should be prescribed when they are needed.'

- Last week the government announced an extra £1.4 billion for the APHA to protect the country against what it said were the 'increasing threats' of animal and plant diseases. The new funding, announced by the chancellor, will be used to redevelop and 'future-proof' the APHA's current Weybridge facility. The APHA is currently supporting Public Health England in the government's response to the coronavirus outbreak.
- While many entertainment and leisure venues have now closed after the government

advised people to avoid them, the UK's zoos remained open as of this week.

- Several leading scientific institutions last week called for greater investment into researching emerging zoonoses like Covid-19 – among them, the Zoological Society of London, whose director general, Dominic Jermy, said: 'We are seeing widespread reforms in British science so I hope the government will take this opportunity to make multidisciplinary wildlife health research the priority it must be to prevent similar pandemics in future.'
- Numerous vet events have been cancelled or postponed, including the British Small Animal Veterinary Association congress, which was due to take place on 2–5 April.
- Staff at the RCVS have all moved to remote working, with the offices at Belgravia House closing for the foreseeable future.