

COVID-19 Safety Considerations for Resuming Therapy Animal Visits

When you welcome Pet Partners therapy animal teams to your facility, you are welcoming teams that meet the highest standards for client safety. While it is the facility's decision on when to resume therapy animal visits based on the population they serve, the Pet Partners infection prevention guidelines are designed to minimize the risk of spreading all unwanted germs, including COVID-19. In the event a facility and Pet Partners have differing policies on the same topic, the more conservative of the two shall apply.

Summary of Safety Protocols for Every Pet Partners Therapy Animal Visit:

- ▶ **Hand hygiene.** Before and after every interaction, the handler and anyone wishing to pet the therapy animal must wash hands or apply hand sanitizer.
- ▶ **Posted precautions.** Teams are not permitted in any rooms with posted airborne, droplet, or contact precautions.
- ▶ **Grooming.** All animals are bathed within 24 hours of a visit.
- ▶ **Barriers.** If a therapy animal will be placed on facility furniture, such as a chair or bed, a barrier that is not shared between clients must be used.
- ▶ **Animal health.** Animals must be in good health to participate in visits. This includes being free of internal and external parasites.
- ▶ **Handler health.** Handlers must be in good health to visit. If a handler knows they have been exposed to coronavirus or another contagious illness, or a member of their household is currently ill, they must suspend visiting temporarily.
- ▶ **Raw diet.** Raw meat diets and treats carry additional risk of zoonotic contamination. Since therapy animals often interact with people whose immune systems are not optimal, raw meat food and treats are not permitted.
- ▶ **Rabies.** All Pet Partners therapy animals (when appropriate for the species) are required to be vaccinated against rabies, consistent with recommendations by SHEA for animals in healthcare facilities.

Special COVID-19 Considerations:

- ▶ **Follow all local recommendations.** Different states and jurisdictions may have different guidelines for resuming pre-COVID activities. Handlers and facilities are responsible for understanding and following the guidance of their local government.
- ▶ **Masks.** Pet Partners follows CDC guidance on masks and face coverings and does not require vaccinated individuals to wear a face mask. However, if the facility or local authorities require masks, any Pet Partners volunteer must follow that requirement. It is not appropriate for therapy animals to wear masks.
- ▶ **Prudent social distancing.** Social distancing refers to limiting the proximity and contact between two or more people. Therapy animal visits assume some level of contact between clients and the therapy animal team. During visits, handlers are not to socially distance themselves from their animal, as physical nearness to their animal is a critical component of YAYABA™ (You Are Your Animal's Best Advocate) and animal welfare.

There are many in our communities who could benefit from the love of a therapy animal as we begin to recover from the pandemic. We all have a responsibility to ensure interactions with therapy animals promote health and safety through rigorous infection prevention. For more information about standards of practice in animal-assisted interventions visit www.petpartners.org/standards.