



# College of Veterinarians of British Columbia

## *Frequently Asked Questions:*

### *Guidelines for the Use of Telemedicine in Veterinary Practice*

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#### **1. What does practising veterinary medicine via telemedicine mean?**

Practising via telemedicine refers to delivering veterinary medicine at a distance using telecommunication technology. It is a *method* or *mode* of delivering veterinary medicine using information and communication technologies, such as video chat, when the veterinarian and animal being treated are in different physical locations. Practising via telemedicine does not alter a veterinarian's existing legal and professional obligations.

#### **2. What are the expectations of a veterinarian when utilizing telemedicine exclusively?**

A veterinarian can practice exclusively via telemedicine from an accredited facility and can establish a VCPR via telemedicine if required and well documented. He or she must inform the client about the limited scope of services that are available via telemedicine; services are limited due to the veterinarian's inability to perform a physical examination, do testing, or dispense drugs.

#### **3. Does telemedicine include consultation between veterinarians?**

A consulting practice means a veterinary practice in which a registrant provides veterinary services to other registrants or practice facilities, including online, and does not have its own premise, structure, vehicle, or facility. Without an accredited practice facility, the registrant cannot offer telemedicine directly to the public, so this would not be included in telemedicine in B.C..

#### **4. What jurisdiction applies in the practice of telemedicine if a veterinarian and the patient/client are not in the same location?**

The College of Veterinarians of B.C. considers that professional services are rendered where the animal(s) is located. All veterinarians who are treating animal(s), groups of animals, or herds that are in British Columbia must be licensed in B.C.. Veterinarians who treat B.C. animals, groups of animals, or herds without an B.C. licence are engaged in unauthorized practice.

## **5. What are some examples of the appropriate use of telemedicine?**

- A family on vacation consults with their veterinarian, with whom they have a VCPR, about an issue related to their pet's diabetes that the veterinarian has been treating. The veterinarian determines that he or she can consult about the condition without a physical examination, because one was performed recently and the current problem does not warrant any additional tests or exams.
- A family skypes with their veterinarian to confer about a follow-up question after a recent onsite appointment.
- A veterinarian consults with a client in a remote region via e-mail, inclusive of digital photographs on an ongoing problem.
- A food producer consults a veterinarian via video chat about a potential skin condition in a herd of beef cattle.

## **6. Does service to a remote area require a valid and pre-existing VCPR if a client cannot get to a veterinarian in time?**

There are exceptions to the need to establish a VCPR prior to providing veterinary medicine, including situations where a veterinarian, acting reasonably and with evidence, determines that there is an emergency situation and that an animal or animals require(s) immediate veterinary services.

## **7. Does a veterinarian have to work from an accredited facility to practice via telemedicine?**

Yes. A veterinarian licensed in British Columbia must work from an accredited practice facility to practice veterinary medicine. This is no different when practicing via telemedicine. The veterinarian can be the owner or an associate at an accredited hospital, mobile, or office that offers telemedicine services. Veterinarians do not have to be physically present at the accredited facility to provide telemedicine service, although they can be.

A veterinarian may also open a new practice that exclusively provides telemedicine services,, BUT they would need to apply to the College to become accredited as a mobile practice so that in person examination is possible.

## **8. How often should a veterinarian see an animal, group of animals, or herd in person when practising via telemedicine?**

The appropriate timelines of visits will depend on the circumstances of a case and on the VCPR and so are left to the professional and competent judgement of the veterinarian.

**9. Can a veterinarian work with a third-party company that provides a software or web interface which offers virtual access to veterinary services?**

Yes. Third-party companies may offer and provide virtual platform programs to veterinarians that facilitate public access to veterinary services. The actual veterinary service must be provided by veterinarians licensed to practice in BC only and veterinarians must be affiliated with a BC accredited practice facility. A third-party company is not an accredited facility.

**10. How will clients know who is responding to a query via telemedicine?**

A veterinarian should always clearly identify themselves and indicate their location/jurisdiction of practice and accredited facility name to the client as an assurance of the veterinarian's identity. They should indicate that this information is verifiable on the public register on the CVBC website. [Online Registry » College of Veterinarians of BC \(cvbc.ca\)](https://www.cvbc.ca/online-registry)

**11. When should veterinarians respond to queries made via telemedicine?**

Telemedicine is merely a mode of delivering veterinary medicine. Practising via telemedicine does not change a veterinarian's existing professional obligations to provide guidance to clients on what is necessary to provide safe, quality animal care.

**12. Is it permissible to bill clients for services that are provided via telemedicine?**

Veterinarians can bill for services provided via telemedicine when they feel that it would be appropriate to do so.

**13. What are the medical record requirements when practising via telemedicine?**

A veterinarian's existing legal and professional obligations are not altered when veterinary services are provided via telemedicine. This includes the requirement to keep accurate and complete medical records which should be kept at the accredited facility that the veterinarian is associated with. Veterinarians should adhere to the medical records requirements required by the CVBC [see [Guide-to-the-Medical-Records-Standards.pdf \(at cvbc.ca\)](#)] when providing veterinary medicine via telemedicine. A veterinarian should make a note that a service was provided via telemedicine if he or she also offers services in-person. Following a telemedicine encounter, the veterinarian should transfer medical records to a client's primary care veterinarian, if applicable.