

## **Preparedness and Response to Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19) among Veterinary Practitioners in Sri Lanka**

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Coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19), first identified in Wuhan, China, was declared a “pandemic” by the World Health Organization in March 2020. This resulted in imposition of many short-term ‘lockdowns’ that temporarily suspended many veterinary-related activities. Therefore, veterinarians were compelled to adopt preventive practices as per guidelines issued by authorities to continue the essential work. The current study examines the level of awareness and adoption of such guidelines by veterinary practitioners in Sri Lanka by four months after the first case was reported. An online cross-sectional survey was circulated among veterinarians *via* email and social media. A total of 100 veterinary practitioners, of whom 74.5% were full-time companion animal practitioners, anonymously and voluntarily responded. Of the respondents, 64% were females and 70.4% were less than 40-years-old. Respondents identified fever (89.9%), respiratory illness (66.7%) and sore throat (60.6%) as the three commonest COVID-19 symptoms. Only 50% of the respondents were aware that asymptomatic COVID-19 is more common than the symptomatic disease. Most respondents (84.8%) were aware of the zoonanthropotic potential of SARS-CoV-2, the causative agent of COVID-19. Publications by health organizations (68.7%) and electronic media (69.7%) were identified as the major sources of COVID-19-related information. Hand-hygiene (98%) and mask-wearing (98%) were the most common preventive measures adopted by respondents. Most participants prioritized urgent visits in their practices (79.2%) and adopted telemedicine (75.3%) during lockdown periods. However, most practitioners failed to use isolation rooms for examining animals with suspected SARS-CoV-2 infection (88.6%) or to check the body temperature of staff (75.3%). Only 52.2% of the respondents had received COVID-19-related safety guidelines issued by the local authorities and of these, more than 70% were not satisfied about the quality of information received. This study highlights the need to educate veterinary practitioners about the guidelines for prevention and control of COVID-19 so that veterinarians can be better prepared to respond to similar situations in the future.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Guidelines, Pandemic, Questionnaire, Veterinary practitioners