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An Emergency Contraceptive Option for Cats During COVID-19 Delayed Surgery

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This webinar’s audience:

- Veterinarians & Staff: 39%
- Shelter/Rescue Staff: 28%
- Volunteer: 13%
- Other: 13%
- Pet Owner or Community Member: 6%
But first, a quick poll
Look who we finally got to see today! Not going to pretend that I didn’t bawl like a baby when he left to go back to work. We miss him, but we are doing what we have to do. 😢❤️

Count your blessings. That’s what’s getting us through this!

***I’ve had a few people message me asking if they can share this. Of course you can. Maybe it’ll encourage more people to stay home.***
COVID-19 status 4/10/20

People without symptoms are fueling coronavirus

New estimates show 25% to 50% of virus carriers can infect others blindly. It’s prompting US officials to rethink who should wear masks.

5 critical responses for shelters in the COVID era

1. Preserve critical functions
2. Suspend non-emergency functions
3. Reduce shelter populations
4. Preserve lifesaving practices
5. Handling COVID-19 exposed animals
“The time for half measures is over. History will not forgive us for waiting an hour more.”

Critical functions

- Designate animal control, animal shelters, and veterinary clinics as essential services
- Law enforcement assistance
- Injured and sick strays
- Cruelty and neglect complaints
- Dangerous dog complaints
- Protective custody

https://www.nacanet.org/naca-statements-on-covid-19/
Non-emergency functions

- Non-aggressive stray pickup
- Leash law and licensing complaints
- Barking and nuisance complaints
- Conflict mitigation scenarios
- Trapping and transporting community cats
- Public spay/neuter and wellness clinics

"There is so much we don’t know, but that doesn’t mean we can’t act."

https://www.wormsandgermsblog.com/
www.nacanet.org
Sample decision tree on veterinary emergencies (NJ VMA)

- Is this procedure necessary to save the animal’s life?
- Is it necessary to alleviate pain or suffering?
- Does it prevent zoonotic disease?
- Could it be managed in a way that mitigates COVID risk?
- Does it require use of scarce resources needed for critical human medical care?
- Or can this patient safely wait until resources are less scarce and human health risks are lower?

“Human beings remain the greatest risk for transmitting new infections.”

https://njvma.org/page/QuestionstoConsiderMakingDecisionsonElectivevsNon-ElectiveCare
“We were all making fantastic strides and this is a punch to the gut.”

Spay/neuter is non-emergency

- Essential surgery is for
  - Life-threatening, rapid deterioration, permanent dysfunction, relief of suffering

- Spay/neuter must be paused to preserve resources, protect personnel, relieve burden on healthcare system
  - Neuter before adoption → adopt/foster with agreements
  - Trap-neuter-return → leave cats in place for now
  - Do not euthanize or hold animals in shelter pending spay/neuter
  - Temporary exemption from NBA laws
  - Replace with telemedicine for foster rechecks, medication refills, etc

- Thousands of intact cats have been placed in adoption and foster homes and community cat TNR programs are suspended

Stronger together: This is an unbelievably sad and frightening time. We need our vets, staff, clients, and trappers to stay safe, shorten this crisis, and be ready to come back to caring for our communities, animals and spay/neuter at levels that have never happened before.
Megestrol Acetate

A Possible Adjunct to Spaying Female Cats During COVID-19 Crisis
Megestrol Acetate

**Synthetic Progestin**

- **Stops ovulation**
- **Thickens uterine lining**

Diagram:

- Hypothalamus
- GnRH
- Anterior pituitary
- LH, FSH
- Female Ovaries
- Gonads
- Estradiol
- Progesterone
- Sex hormones
- MA (Megestrol Acetate)
# Megestrol Acetate

## Uses & Availability

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| **Cats** | • Not registered in US, but is in other countries  
|        | • Decades of off-label use for fertility control |
| **Dogs** | • *Ovaban*® FDA approved in US for postponing estrus |
| **People** | • Currently used for other conditions, but no longer birth control |
Available Formulations

- Veterinary prescription
- Liquid less expensive
- Liquid compounded
- ~180 day shelf life*
- 10 mg/ml = “sweet spot”
- Very affordable
“Low Dosing”* for Individual Cats

One cat. One dose. One week

0.625 mg/kg = ~2.5 mg/cat/week

If cat is in heat: 5 mg dose/3 first week, then 25 mg/cat/week/after

Maximum 30 weeks

Efficacy

- Decades of widespread usage with reported success but.....
- Very little hard data
  - Oen 1977*
    - 244 cats
    - 30 weeks
    - Two litters
    - 21 with signs of heat
- Check out Romagnoli 2015 for more references
What about....?

- **Male cats**
  - No fertility control

- **Kittens < 4mo**
  - Avoid due to uterine changes

- **Pregnant cats**
  - Reports of stillborns
  - Kitten masculinization
Microdosing* for Managed Cat Colonies

- 0.1 to 0.2 mg/kg/cat weekly*
- **Caution** to prevent unequal distribution
- No peer-reviewed data
- VCPR concerns – check!

Megestrol Acetate

Side Effects

**Micro**
0.1 - 0.2 mg/kg/week
- Increased appetite
- Weight gain
- Haircoat changes

**Low**
0.625 mg/kg/week
- Transient diabetes
- Adrenocortical suppression
- Haircoat changes

**Intermediate**
0.625 mg/kg/day
- Mammary tumors
- Uterine lesions
- Pyometra

**High**
> 0.625 mg/kg/day
Megestrol Acetate

Fear

Hypothesis
What is a VCPR?

- The Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship must be established during an in-person visit and is required for the practice of veterinary medicine.
- Some states are waiving requirement for in-person visit to establish a VCPR during COVID pandemic.
- Presents challenges for pets lacking a current vet or for community cats.

#StayHome
# Flatten The Curve
“We are turning our communities into shelters.”

What is telemedicine?

• Telemedicine is the practice of medicine using technology to deliver care at a distance. A physician in one location uses a telecommunications infrastructure to deliver care to a patient at a distant site.

• Practice of veterinary medicine includes diagnosis, prognosis, treatment.
What is compounding?

• The customized manipulation of an approved drug(s) by a veterinarian, or by a pharmacist upon the prescription of a veterinarian, to meet the needs of a particular patient
  o Mixing 2 medications
  o Making oral suspensions from tablets
  o Adding flavoring
  o Transdermal gels

“We must move faster and be braver than ever before.”
Regulation

Compounding laws vary by state

- “Office stock” can be used for pets owned by the shelter (including fosters)
- Individual prescriptions needed for privately owned animals and community cats

Compounding pharmacies can help navigate in each state

“In order to help veterinarians utilize telemedicine to address animal health needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, the FDA generally does not intend to enforce the animal examination and premises visit portion of the VCPR requirements relevant to the FDA regulations governing Extralabel Drug Use in Animals and Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD) drugs. This will allow veterinarians to prescribe drugs in an extralabel manner or authorize the use of VFD drugs without direct examination of or making visits to their patients, which will limit human-to-human interaction and potential spread of COVID-19 in the community.”
Best Friends Vet Access App

Sign up your fosters for FREE access to a veterinarian 24 hours a day, 365 days a year through Best Friends Vet Access mobile app.

#ThanksToMaddie, this service is now available for FREE to fosters working with any animal shelter or rescue group in the country (while licenses last)

Call, video, or text chat and the veterinarian will advise if the foster can handle at home or requires an in person vet visit. For more information, visit: https://bit.ly/BFVAFoster
www.facebook.com/groups/VeterinaryTelemed/
Community cats

- MA generally used as a stopgap while awaiting TNR and for hard-to-trap cats
- Has been fed to individual cats in canned food weekly or as a bulk mix divided into plastic dishes 1-2x weekly
- VCPGR: Who is the owner? How to adapt “herd” health concepts?
Community cat case study

• 20 acre government housing complex in Florida
• 1999 to present: managed with TNR and adoption
• MA for new cats (even if sex unknown), hard to trap cats
• One un-trappable cat had 9 litters, then treated successfully with MA 2008-2013
• Colony peaked at 135 and currently at 20 cats
• “The only side effect from the medicine is a positive one: the mom cats start to look healthy.”
Animal Welfare
DAILY DIGEST

Everything you need to know about animal welfare and COVID-19 TODAY...from your friends at:

https://mailchi.mp/animalwelfaredigest/subscribe
Learning from this response

• Understand this emergency tactic as crisis management, and as innovation

• In general
  – Who uses/their results
  – Prescriber/Cat owners/caretakers

• In depth
  – closer look at some dedicated efforts with strong ability to evaluate

• Separately, modeling results of a gap in services.
Summary

1. Megestrol acetate (MA) can prevent heat and pregnancy in female cats. Can also “halt” estrus at higher/more frequent dose.

2. “Buy time” while waiting for spay surgery

3. Low dose MA maximizes efficacy/minimizes side effects:
   
   \[
   \text{0.625 mg/kg once per week (about 2.5 mg per average adult cat)}
   \]

   **ONE DOSE ONE CAT! – weekly up to 30 weeks (hopefully less!**

4. Veterinarian Prescription and VCPR

5. “off label use;” common in veterinary medicine, guidelines to follow

6. Affordable compounded liquid formulation - especially w/ office stock
Questions
Please take our closing poll!
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Questions: info@acc-d.org
For more information: www.acc-d.org