



## **There Is One BC Healthcare Provider That Still Cannot Get The COVID-19 Vaccine: Your Other Family Doctor**

### Open letter to Minister Adrian Dix and Dr. Bonnie Henry:

BC veterinarians have put themselves in harm's way to protect public health and your animals (pets, farm animals, horses, exotics, wildlife, aquaculture, honeybees, and more) since the very beginning of COVID-19. Yet BC veterinarians have been denied access to the COVID-19 vaccine alongside BC's other healthcare professionals such as dentists, physiotherapists, and registered massage therapists, many of whom received their first vaccine in the last few weeks.

The Ministry of Health on March 9 determined that BC veterinarians are not part of any group receiving the vaccine early. The Ministry of Health wrote to BC veterinarians that "it is important to be patient and understanding while waiting for your turn for immunization." While BC veterinarians are encouraged to be more patient than other frontline healthcare providers currently being vaccinated, animals are dying and public safety is being put at risk.

Why are BC veterinarians not eligible for the vaccine? We cannot think of a single valid reason.



**Duncan: staff restrain a dog to draw blood**

Unlike many other healthcare providers, veterinarians have no ability to distance themselves from others while providing care for animal patients. Animals need to be restrained, which is typically a multi-person task, involving staff or, for large animals or horses, the owners or farm employees. Wearing masks is mandatory; keeping your distance is impossible. Worse, animals do not always cooperate, meaning masks can be knocked off.

Surgery on a small animal requires close proximity of multiple staff members and the veterinarian, especially given the small size of some patients.



**Kelowna: staff prepare a dog for surgery**



**Vancouver: staff prepare a dog for treatment**

Even non-surgical procedures almost always require two people: one to hold the animal and the other to treat the animal. Oftentimes, there are many people involved in one procedure.

Large animal, farm animal, and horse veterinarians have ZERO ability to isolate themselves from the owners or farm employees. There is no curbside drop-off for cows, horses, sheep, chickens, or even goats.



**Nanose Bay: owner on-farm holds a goat for first vaccine**



All wild animals including sick kangaroos require multiple staff members to care for them. We know that some animal species such as mink or related animals such as ferrets may also be at a greater risk for the disease.

**Kelowna: veterinarian offers kangaroo Bee a banana as she recovers**

Exotic animal veterinarians need many hands to do procedures such as tube feeding an injured owl.



**Maple Ridge: staff care for an owl with a broken wing**

The reality is that BC veterinarians play a vital role in public and animal health as well as biosecurity. Our veterinary teams are at risk of contracting COVID-19 solely for performing their essential services. Should a staff member test positive for the virus, entire staffs must isolate and stay home, which creates a risk for everyone they contact in person. This causes clinics to close, placing an undue strain on nearby clinics who must pick-up the urgent care required by many of their animal patients. There are no back-up personnel waiting to be called in.

Urgent cases are then re-routed to emergency hospitals increasing those wait times. Often, no emergency hospital is available, leaving animals to suffer and sometimes die. House call veterinary visits are increasing. Veterinarians wash and glove up and mask, but they're entering people's homes where very sick animals need immediate care. Mobile practices can see ten clients each day, and then meet back in central locations to end their shift. If mobile veterinarians do not perform mobile work, animals in critical distress will have miserable, painful deaths.

BC veterinarians have never felt so undervalued by the BC healthcare system and some for the first time have contemplated quitting. BC veterinarians could close their doors, stay home, and stay safe, but they won't. They will keep showing up to work, protecting the health and welfare of animals and continuing their significant contribution to public health.

BC veterinarians need the COVID-19 vaccine now. We are pleading with Minister Dix and Dr. Henry to recognize the urgent, significant, and vitally important roles BC veterinarians play in protecting the health and welfare of pets, farm animals, horses, wildlife, aquaculture, honeybees, as well as biosecurity, and include BC veterinarians in the current healthcare categories receiving the vaccine today.

For more information or to arrange an interview with a BC veterinarian:  
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