

Considerations for trapping community cats while social distancing.

The COVID-19 crisis is an evolving crisis. Information may change over time and by region. It is important to follow current guidelines issued by your state and local authorities in addition to those issued by the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to keep you and your community safe.

Getting started

Confirm your spay/neuter clinic is open and has capacity. Clinics that previously accepted community cats on a walk-in basis may now require appointments.

Clinics will have revised protocols for operating to limit contact between people and with surfaces where the virus may linger, such as paper admission forms or forms of payment like cash, checks or credit card slips. Learn what you need to do for check-in and check-out ahead of time so that you are prepared.

Prioritize your trapping

Consider prioritizing the cats and colonies you need to trap if spay/neuter capacity is limited. Base your decisions on which cats are most in need, while avoiding locations where you may be at greater risk of contracting the virus.

- To limit the number of people you come into contact with, prioritize trapping a large colony versus trapping at multiple sites with only a few cats at each. [Always aim to trap all, or as close to all as possible, of the cats in one colony before moving on to another.]
- If trapping single cats or small groups, prioritize sites with female cats who may be pregnant or at high risk of pregnancy. Give lower priority to sites with only male cats or kittens under five months of age who will be returned to the colony.
- Consider how easy or difficult it will be to maintain social distancing at the location. For example, select a trapping site that can be accessed without going through a home or other building.
- Prioritize trapping sites where you are already familiar with the caretaker and/or other residents and additional door-to-door outreach is not needed.
- Consider how open neighborhood residents may be to the presence of outsiders at this time. This social climate may change as the impact of the pandemic on the community changes. Be sensitive to their concerns and the precautions they are taking to protect themselves from community spread.
- Avoid trapping at any site where a caretaker has a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19. If necessary, arrange for a back-up feeder to care for the colony cats while the primary caretaker recovers.

Outreach to known caretakers and residents

Communicate with caretakers or residents at the trapping site by phone call or text rather than in person. Make sure you have their contact info as well as the numbers for any additional residents you need to coordinate with ahead of trapping day.



If you are unfamiliar with the trapping site, have the caretaker or resident give you a virtual tour by emailing or texting you photos or by using Google Maps, rather than showing you in person. Have them point out key areas such as where cats are fed and paths which they travel.

Request that residents, workers or others inside buildings at the site remain indoors. Avoid entering homes or other occupied buildings. If a caretaker needs to be on the scene during trapping, [maintain social distancing](#) and minimize the amount of time the caretaker is there. For example, if the cats show up when they hear the feeder's car engine, have the caretaker pull up, stay in the car and communicate with you by phone. In all scenarios, everyone should wear a face mask.

For any caretaker or resident present while trapping, make sure you have their contact information and they have yours. This may be needed for contact tracing should anyone involved later test positive for COVID-19.

Precautions while trapping

If you are sick, have tested positive for COVID-19 or are experiencing any symptoms that may be related to COVID-19, stay home. If you have been exposed to anyone who has tested positive for or is experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, stay home. Do not resume trapping until you have been medically cleared to do so.

Trap on your own rather than in teams. If it is not possible to trap independently, no more than two people should participate in the trapping at one time.

Maintain current [CDC recommended social distancing](#) with any caretakers, other trappers and members of the public in the vicinity.

Follow current CDC recommendations on how to [protect yourself and others from getting sick](#):

- Wear a properly fitted [cloth face covering](#) at all times, even when you are outside. Be mindful about not touching your face.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water before and after trapping.
- In the field, when soap and water are not available, use hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol after touching objects or surfaces which may have been touched by others.
- Do the same when dropping off and picking up the cats at the clinic. Thoroughly wash or sanitize your hands after touching doorknobs, pens, clipboards or other objects touched by others.

If you are working with a second trapper who is not already in your same isolation bubble (such as a spouse or housemate), take steps to ensure social distancing can be maintained:

- Each trapper should use their own set of supplies and drive a separate vehicle.
- Minimize mutual handling of traps. Have only one person carrying, setting or otherwise handling traps if possible. If more than one person is handling the traps, wipe points of contact (trap handles, trap door) with disinfectant before touching and use hand sanitizer afterwards.

Take steps to maintain social distancing from the public while trapping:

- Avoid trapping at locations with high foot traffic (e.g., recreational path) or trap at hours when traffic is low (e.g., early morning, late night).
- Discourage people from walking near the trap site or from stopping and having conversations. Consider using traffic cones and signage to direct pedestrian flow away from your location.
- Be prepared for people who are practicing different levels of social distancing, or none at all.

Keep traps fully covered, group only cats from the same colony together during holding and recovery, and keep trapped cats separate from your own cats. These normal best practices will help keep cats calm and reduce the chance of any virus—common or novel—from being spread among the cats.

Clean and disinfect

Following your trapping project, do not cut corners on cleaning protocols. [Clean and disinfect](#) traps and other equipment with a product approved for use against SARS-CoV-2. Do this as well with any vehicles used to transport cats or holding areas where cats were housed before and after surgery. Allow disinfectant to remain on equipment or other surfaces used for the period of time stated on the label or in this [list of approved disinfectants](#) from the Environmental Protection Agency. Accelerated hydrogen peroxide (sold as Rescue or Accel) and bleach are on the list. Trap covers should be laundered at the warmest appropriate setting. As always, change clothes as soon as you arrive home after working with the cats and wash your hands before touching pets, surfaces, etc.

Prepare for kittens

It is not unusual when trapping during kitten season to come across a previously unknown litter of kittens at or near weaning age. Before setting out to trap them, know what options these kittens have for socialization and adoption at this time. Your local shelter or rescue organization may be closed to all but emergency intake, or may be open for kittens and have a waiting list of fosters available. The caretaker or other resident may also be willing to foster any kittens found at the colony and may be a preferable diversion from the shelter. If placement is not available, kittens can receive appropriate veterinary care for their age and weight and be returned to their colonies.

Stay Informed

While there have been a small number of cats reported to have contracted COVID-19, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) finds no current evidence that companion animals can spread the virus to people. As this is a rapidly evolving situation, please monitor the [AVMA](#) and [CDC](#) websites for the most up-to-date recommendations regarding companion animals and COVID-19. This will also help you be prepared should someone you encounter while trapping expresses concern about cats spreading the virus.

Find more information on trapping and caring for cats in traps, visit [Neighborhood Cats](#).



Find more information on dealing with COVID-19 at animalsheltering.org/covid-19.

