



Using veterinary telemedicine (VTM)

Using veterinary telemedicine (VTM) VTM is not currently provided for in the Tasmanian Veterinary Standards. However, VTM may be a helpful tool to minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19. We expect veterinarians to use their professional judgment to decide whether using VTM is appropriate in particular circumstances. The VSS4 allows that direct examination of the animals to be treated may be omitted before supply of drugs in the following circumstances: a) the vet has an existing relationship through having a detailed knowledge of the client and the client's animals. Detailed knowledge would include records of regular visits, clinical examinations, pathology/laboratory results, previous appropriate supply of drugs; b) for the immediate relief of suffering only. In light of the risk COVID-19 poses, we believe that, if it becomes widespread in Tasmania, it may be appropriate for veterinarians to use VTM to authorise medicines where they can reasonably judge it safe to do so using patient histories and/or recent visits to the premises even without having seen the animal recently. While this departs from the clear standard set in the Code, we consider that it may be justified in this extreme situation to protect veterinarians, their staff, and the wider public. Risk assessment and professional judgment by the veterinarian in each case is still vital. Refer to below regarding making these decisions.

When making decisions that go beyond the current Legislation, Standards and Guidelines, what factors should I consider?

When making decisions of this kind, the key questions to consider are:

- Is immediate action necessary in the interests of animal welfare?
- Can I delay treatment until a physical examination is possible?
- Can I direct the animal/owner to another source of assistance?
- What are the client's views?
- What are the risks (including consideration of the nature and quantity of any drugs being prescribed)?
- What are the benefits?
- How, and how often, will I follow up with the owner to monitor their animal's progress?
- In my professional opinion, is it reasonable in all the circumstances?
- Can I justify my decision? If you make decisions that deviate from the VBT Code of Professional Conduct or supporting guidance, you should make detailed notes of the decision, together with the reasons for it (taking into account the above questions) and ensure that any consent given by the client is fully informed, for example, the risks associated with any medication prescribed remotely may be higher because there has been no physical examination.