

# Is Virtual Care the Future of Your Pet's Health?

Considering booking a telemedicine consultation with your veterinarian? Here's what you need to know about this platform, and how it's helping revolutionize veterinary care today.

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated veterinary telemedicine adoption, allowing pet parents to consult veterinarians from home and helping professionals extend their geographical reach beyond traditional clinic boundaries
- Telemedicine benefits include 24/7 chat support, improved monitoring of sick animals, easier access to specialists, and better options for pet owners with transportation or mobility challenges
- Studies show cats experience less stress during telemedicine appointments, making it particularly valuable for feline care since many cats have poor experience from prior visits
- Research demonstrates that pet owners appreciate telemedicine's benefits, including reduced travel time, decreased pet stress and improved access to veterinary care
- While telemedicine offers numerous advantages, it cannot fully replace in-person examinations due to limitations in physical assessments and potential diagnostic inaccuracies without hands-on evaluation

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed the way people communicate with their doctors. With many of them unable to go out of their homes, the only way they could receive medical care was through online means, a practice also known as telemedicine/telehealth.

In the same way, veterinarians had to adapt due to the lockdowns, too. Since many pet parents couldn't visit clinics, veterinarians had to make adjustments so they could be reached and provide their services in return. This has caused a veterinary telehealth boom, and it looks like this approach is here to stay, according to research.

## Veterinary Telemedicine Is on the Rise

In a study published in *Open Veterinary Journal*,<sup>1</sup> researchers reviewed the current state of veterinary telemedicine across the globe. In particular, they looked into the technology used, limitation and legal aspects. However, the most important part of the study is the benefits of using this approach, such as transcending geographical limitations for both the animal and the veterinarian. According to the researchers:<sup>2</sup>

*"With the use of veterinary telemedicine, pet owners now have a way to communicate with a veterinarian from the comfort of their own home. Therefore, the geographical reach of clinical veterinary practice is increased via veterinary telemedicine. Veterinary telemedicine, as an adjunct to traditional veterinary medicine, has many benefits for animals, clients and veterinarians."*

*These benefits include the ability for veterinarians to quickly and effectively chat support around the clock, the ability for fewer veterinarians to monitor more ill animals, and the ease with which primary veterinarians can access specialists that will lower clinical errors and enhance treatment outcomes.*

*In addition, veterinary telemedicine gives vets a chance to connect with customers who might be physically unable to transport their patients to a hospital for every assessment or follow-up visit. Telemedicine offers veterinary nurses job options without the hassle of moving."*

While the upsides to veterinary telemedicine are clear, note that there are some caveats, too. For example, having an unstable internet connection could make the experience unpleasant. Furthermore, other equipment is needed, such as cameras and gadgets to come up with a successful diagnosis.<sup>3</sup>

For an effective telemedicine consultation, your veterinarian must be open to taking advantage of technology. As noted by the researchers, "A telemedicine system is a tool that will not advance veterinary practice unless the veterinarians take action to do so."<sup>4</sup> But despite the limitations, the future looks bright since the pros outweigh the cons.

## **Telemedicine Can Do Wonders for Cat Parents**

Are you a proud cat parent? By now, you're aware that cats are usually skittish of vet visits. If this is the case for your kitty, then consider looking for an integrative veterinarian who offers telemedicine, as it can help them receive veterinary care more often. According to one study,<sup>5</sup> fewer cats receive veterinary care each year because of prior stressful visits to clinics, and that encouraging pet parents to use telemedicine would be beneficial for all parties involved.

To test the hypothesis, researchers gathered 1,636 participants who are at least 18 years old and own at least one cat. Then, respondents answered a 54-item questionnaire covering topics such as their experiences with telemedicine and opinions on on-site consultations.<sup>6</sup>

Based on the collated results, respondents noted that it was easier for them to handle their cats during and after a telemedicine appointment. Furthermore, they noted other benefits, such as being a convenience for those who have transportation problems or disabilities. The researchers concluded the study, saying that:<sup>7</sup>

*"Overall, the current study results suggest that from the U.S. cat caregiver perspective, incorporating video telemedicine may improve caregiver access to veterinary care, and reduce stress for both cats and caregivers. This is particularly important, given that many cats do not receive veterinary care on a routine basis, thus cats and their caregivers represent an important population that could benefit from the implementation of video telemedicine in veterinary care.*

*Based on participant-reported appointment preferences, cat caregivers are interested in using video telemedicine for most behavioral concerns, some health-related concerns including obesity, medication refills, help managing chronic cat health problems at home and follow-up visits."*

Similar findings were echoed in a study<sup>8</sup> conducted in Lithuania. Here, researchers noted that while veterinary telemedicine services were lacking, those who were able to engage in it did appreciate the benefits of communicating virtually, such as reduced animal stress and time saved from traveling.

## Veterinary Telemedicine Can Be Helpful, but Don't Solely Rely on It

In a previous article, surveys indicate that **around 58% of cat parents say their pet hates going to the vet**, causing them to miss their regular check-ups. This stems from a multitude of reasons, such as the cat's reluctance in going in the carrier, or the cat doesn't like being examined by the vet. Again, telemedicine will be able to help, but don't discount the importance of an in-person visit.

Going back to the Open Veterinary Journal, telemedicine cannot replace the need for a physical examination or the open dialogue between pet parents and veterinarians. Moreover, there's the possibility of an inaccurate diagnosis and animal-side diagnostic devices that can't be used because of the virtual platform.<sup>9</sup>

As noted by the researchers, "Veterinary telemedicine is a supplement to present veterinary medical practice; it does not replace it."<sup>10</sup> So, while there are clear benefits to an online chat with your veterinarian, use your judgment to know when an on-site consultation is needed.

### Sources and References

<sup>1,2,3</sup> [Open Vet J. 2024 Apr 30;14\(4\):952–961, Benefits of Veterinary Telemedicine](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Open Vet J. 2024 Apr 30;14\(4\):952–961, Technology Basics for Veterinary Telemedicine](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery. 2024;26\(8\), Abstract](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery. 2024;26\(8\), Materials and Methods](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Journal of Feline Medicine and Surgery. 2024;26\(8\), Results](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Animals 2024, 14\(13\), 1912, 5, Conclusions](#)

<sup>9,10</sup> [Open Vet J. 2024 Apr 30;14\(4\):952–961, Limitations of Veterinary Telemedicine](#)