

Can my pet be  
**neutered**  
(spayed or castrated)?



**BSAVA**

BRITISH SMALL ANIMAL VETERINARY ASSOCIATION

# Can my pet be neutered (spayed or castrated)?

**During the COVID-19 pandemic, pets should only be neutered if your vet deems there to be a real and current risk to animal health and welfare.**

The pandemic has dramatically altered the way in which vets work. Please remember it is **NOT** 'business as usual' for veterinary practices. At this time, UK vets can:

- work to maintain the food supply chain (this applies to farm animals only)
- provide urgent and emergency care to protect health and welfare

Initial measures put in place to stem the spread of the virus meant that routine pet neutering was stopped. However, as social distancing measures have been extended, suspending all neutering may compromise the health and welfare of some pets.

Every procedure, whether an operation or medical treatment, must be balanced with the fact that the vet, their team and the pet owner will be travelling away from their homes and coming into contact with people and objects they otherwise wouldn't. In addition, performing surgery and anaesthesia usually puts veterinary staff in close contact with each other.

**Your vet will therefore do a risk-benefit analysis before every medical treatment, and will only carry out neutering or medical treatment if there is a real need.**

Please note: This situation is rapidly evolving, and advice may change as government guidance is updated.

# Are there risks if I don't have my pet neutered?

Many pets are at a low risk of welfare problems as a result of neutering being delayed for a short period.

**To decrease the human health risk of COVID-19, it is better to delay neutering for many pets.**

## What should I do if I am planning to have my pet neutered?

**1**

Phone your veterinary practice. Please don't visit the practice without first calling ahead.

**2**

If you have changed veterinary practice since your last visit to the vet, please have all your pet's information to hand before contacting the new practice.

**3**

Make your vet aware if you have COVID-19 or are in a household where there is a positive or suspected case of COVID-19.

**4**

Please respect your vet's professional judgement. They have a responsibility to protect the safety of their clients, their staff, their families and themselves.

**5**

Please be patient if the process takes a little longer than usual as most practices are operating with fewer staff than normal.

It can be difficult to tell the sex of young cats and rabbits. If you are not absolutely sure of the sex of your pet, please ask advice from your vets.

# How will my vet decide if my pet needs to be neutered?

**Your vet will decide whether or not to either surgically neuter or medically treat at the current time based on your pet's individual circumstances and taking into consideration a number of risk factors, including:**

**1**

Your pet's age and sexual maturity.

**2**

Any current disease or disease that is likely to occur.

**3**

Risk of pregnancy – other animals your pet may come into contact with.

**4**

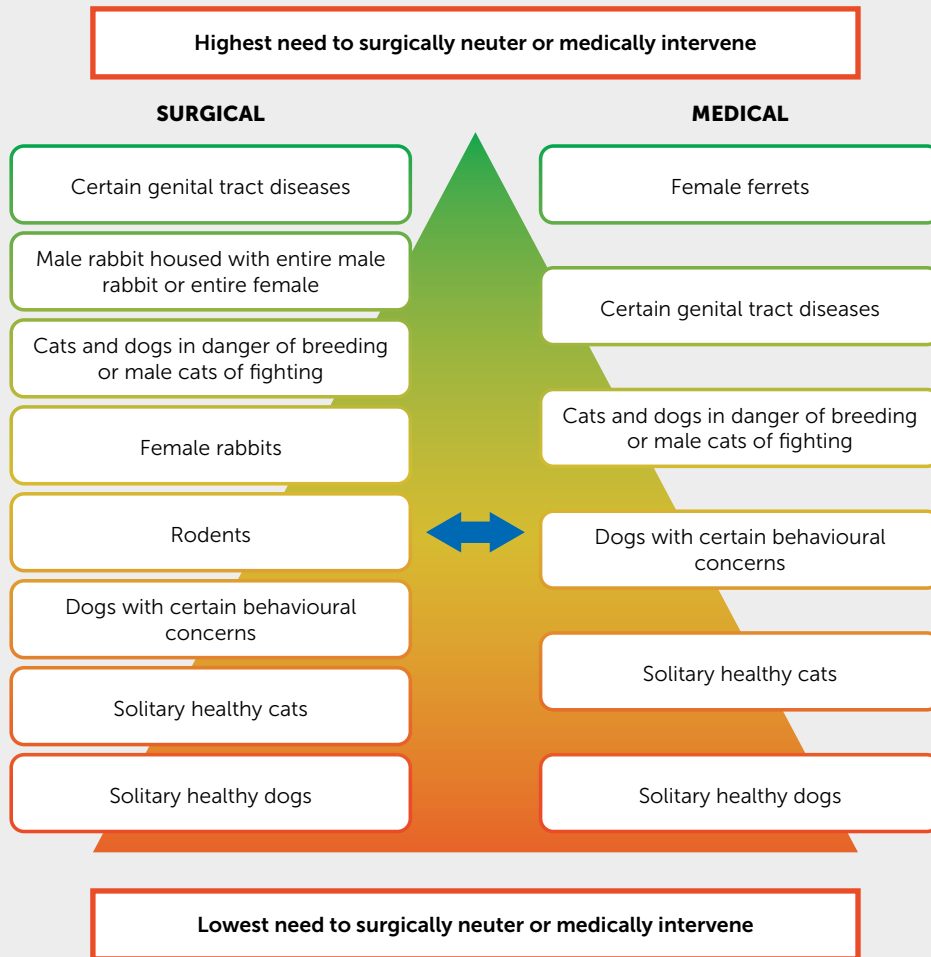
Your pet's lifestyle (indoor/outdoor, other pets in household, etc.).

**5**

The risks of severe aggression between rabbits that need to be housed together for their welfare.

Your vet may suggest you delay your pet's neutering if your pet is considered to be at a low risk of consequences from a temporary delay. They might also suggest medical treatment as a temporary alternative to surgery if this is safe for your pet and if it decreases the risks for the humans involved.

## The BSAVA risk pyramid helps vets decide if neutering is needed during this period.



The relative risk of surgical neutering and temporary medical suppression of oestrus will vary between cases and the practice's facilities to perform GA and surgery safely for all involved.

# What can I do to help lower the risk to my pet during the pandemic?

## Dogs

All female dogs "in heat" should be securely kept indoors, in secure gardens and away from unneutered male dogs. They are most fertile and most likely to get pregnant around 12 days after their bleeding starts (but this is very variable and can occur between 5 and 25 days after bleeding starts). They may try to escape from the house/garden at this time.

For male dogs where there are behavioural concerns, surgical neutering is not always an appropriate course of action and should be delayed until in-depth investigations can be carried out to ascertain the cause of the behavioural change.

## Cats

All unneutered female cats and kittens should be kept indoors and away from unneutered male cats.

If you keep unneutered male and female cats together, then castrating only the male may be the right course of action for the moment to avoid pregnancy. Your vet will be able to advise.

## Ferrets

All female ferrets require medical treatment to control their reproductive cycle.

## Rabbits

Rabbits must be kept in social groups but can cause serious injuries to each other if certain pairs are present e.g. unneutered mature males. Your vet will be able to advise which types of pairing are at greater risk and where intervention may be necessary.

## Visiting a veterinary practice

**If a visit to your vet for surgical neutering or medical treatment is required, please follow the instructions given by your practice and be aware of the relevant government advice on travel, social distancing and hand washing.**

If you have COVID-19, or are from a household where there is a confirmed or suspected case of COVID-19 you must NOT visit the practice. Please phone the vet to discuss alternative arrangements if your pet needs to be seen.

Many practices will ask owners to wait outside and operate a closed-door policy with measures to hand over pets safely to staff whilst adhering strictly to social distancing guidelines.

## Microchipping

**For pets who have not been implanted with a microchip, if neutering is undertaken the pet should be microchipped at the same time. This is a legal requirement for dogs.**

# Additional resources

For more support and advice for looking after your pet during the COVID-19 pandemic, please visit <https://www.bsava.com/adviceforpetowners>

**Additional information** on COVID-19 is available from BSAVA:  
<https://www.bsava.com/COVID-19>

**BSAVA Petsavers Guides** on puppies, kittens and rabbits:  
<http://www.petsavers.org.uk/Pet-guides>





# The British Small Animal Veterinary Association

## Doing the best, together, for small animal health and wellbeing

The BSAVA is the membership association for small animal veterinary professionals. For over 60 years we have been promoting excellence in small animal practice by sharing and developing skills and knowledge within the profession.

We work in the UK and internationally to facilitate training, research and the development of policy. Each year we deliver quality education courses, host the largest small animal Congress in Europe, publish books, manuals, apps and journals designed to support the professional development of vet surgeons and nurses.

## To find out more about the BSAVA visit [bsava.com](https://bsava.com)

