

Pet Adoption during a Pandemic: A Cautionary Tale

Guelph, Ontario – December 1, 2020 – There is no denying it: our furry companions bring us so much joy and comfort. The rise in nationwide pet adoptions and purchases this year since the COVID-19 pandemic started is a testament to the power of the human-animal bond, as people are seeking the emotional support of pets more than ever. While it seems like a good news story all around, with so many pets finding homes this year, there are several concerns that have emerged from the veterinary and shelter communities.

1. Added Expense

Having pets is an added expense, and for the joy they bring us, of course they are worth every penny. However, not everyone can afford pets, and money has to be part of the thinking and decision-making process before committing to a pet. With the financial uncertainties that this pandemic has brought into the world, many people may find that the added expense of pet ownership may not be supportable in their lifestyle. Pets are a lifetime commitment and their needs over their lifetime must be something you can afford to take on.



The rise in pet adoptions since the COVID-19 is a testament to the human-animal bond but bringing a new pet home must be a well thought out decision.

People must be honest and ask themselves:

- Am I financially able to care for this pet now and for its entire life?
- Have I budgeted enough for yearly health expenses (wellness examinations, blood work, dental care, nutrition, immunizations etc.) for its entire life?
- Am I financially prepared for any unforeseen emergency care that my pet may require?
- Have I looked into Pet Insurance to see if that is a good option for me?

2. Time Commitment

There is a time commitment that must be considered for a pet. We are all spending an inordinate amount of time at home now, but what will happen when/if things go back to “normal”? The fear is that these Pandemic Pets will no longer fit into a busier lifestyle,

leading to a surge of surrendered pets to animal shelters. People should be realistic when adopting a new pet, keeping in mind that they may not be staying at home as much in the near future as they are right now.

Before taking on this commitment, people should ask themselves:

- Do I have the time and space in my life to take care of this pet for its entire lifetime?
- Am I acting on a whim just because I am lonely right now, or does a pet truly fit into my life?
- What is the plan for pet care once the pandemic is over (or at least to a point that we get to a “new normal”)?
- Which family members will be in charge of feeding, training, cleaning up after, and spending time with the new pet once everyone is back to school and work and social activities?

3. Behavioural Problems

Veterinary teams are referring to pets adopted earlier this year as “COVID puppies” or “COVID kitties” – they use these tongue-in-cheek terms when these dogs and cats are displaying behavioral problems. As restrictions lifted and people starting going back to work or school or just spending more time out of the house, these pets, who had the undivided attention of the whole family during “lockdown”, are suddenly finding themselves home alone more often. Pets may react to these changes in the family’s patterns and start exhibiting undesirable behaviors, such as separation anxiety, aggression (to the other pets in the home, as well as people), house-soiling, or destroying household items. Many of these common behavioral issues are what lead to the surrender of pets to shelters.

Before bringing a pet into your life, ask yourself:

- Would this pet fit into my pre-COVID lifestyle or is it just convenient now because I am working from home?
- Will my children still be interested in playing with their pet once they are back to school and their normal routine?
- Will we have the time and resources needed to care for this pet properly for its entire life?

4. Consider Fostering First

If you are still considering adopting a pet, but are not completely sure yet, another option to consider is to become a Foster Parent. Animal Shelters, Rescues and Humane Societies frequently need people to volunteer for foster care when their physical space cannot accommodate any more animals. Fostering a pet allows the organization time to find the best forever home for the pet, gives the pet a chance to become used to other people and pets, and lets them have nicer living conditions (versus living in a cage) while waiting to be adopted. As the foster parent, you benefit by having the companionship of a pet without the lifetime commitment, timewise and financially. Fostering a pet may also help you

determine if you are ready to adopt. You may even find that you want to continue offering a foster home, as it can be very rewarding and fulfilling to know that you are helping so many pets.

Overall, the increase in pet adoptions is a good news story – the fact that shelters, rescues and humane societies across Canada have very low numbers of homeless animals right now is great! It is also known that the human-animal bond is good for both the physical and mental health of people and pets, whether you adopt or foster. Even though the rise in pet adoptions has occurred under unfortunate circumstances, the human-animal bonds that are resulting from it are a wonderful side effect; it is the hope that they are powerful enough to last so that these Pandemic Pets are now in their FUR-ever homes.

As the not-for-profit trade association representing the developers, manufacturers, and distributors of animal pharmaceuticals, biologics, feed additives, veterinary health products, and animal pesticides in Canada, the **Canadian Animal Health Institute (CAHI)** is the unified voice and information source for the animal health industry in Canada. CAHI is a national association, whose members are responsible for the sales of approximately 95% of the animal health product market in Canada.

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