

# The Covid Shakeout

Many said at the beginning of the pandemic that people would be dumping their animals and the shelters would be overrun with animals. That kind of makes us "break out in a cold sweat". What really happened is that most of the animals at the shelter found homes or foster homes and the pandemic has been a blessing for the animals (not necessarily for the humans). This good fortune for the animals seems to have occurred in many shelters throughout the United States.

But, alas it hasn't all been fortunate for the animals. In 2017 Sammie's Friends took in 437 kittens during the "kitten season". As cute as they are that is an overwhelming number. Also, AnimalSave and the Grass Valley Shelter took in some litters. At that point, Sammie's Friends decided we had to step up our s/n (spaying/neutering) in the community, to reduce this number. The next year between the "Cat Crisis" program and our ongoing spay/neuter voucher program we s/n around 1500 cats. By 2019 we took in 100 fewer kittens. Yippee! We were making good progress. We thought "Another couple years and we'll have this cut in half, at least". But not so fast, along comes the Covid-19 pandemic. You might think "What the heck does that have to do with anything? Animals don't contract Covid 19". There are often unintended consequences that one doesn't think about.

Veterinarians are considered an essential service and have remained open during the "Shelter in Place" order. They receive guidance, as to proper protocol for seeing patients, from the Center For Disease Control and from the California Veterinary Medical Association.

With very sick people in hospitals, the human hospital doctors and nurses are higher up on the priority list, for receiving ppe (personal protective equipment - i.e. surgical gloves, gowns, masks), needed for surgeries. To us, in the rescue world, this means that when the veterinarians are only able to secure reduced numbers of surgical gloves and other needed ppe they must prioritize what they can do. As an example animals that have an emergency medical condition must be tended too immediately, while routine check ups and s/n can be dealt with later. You may have found that scheduling your pet for routine care is taking much longer. Because of required protocol, appointments take at least 1/3 more time (i.e. In the same amount of time, pre-pandemic, a veterinarian could see 9 or 10 patients, (s)he can now only see 6).

Due to time constraints and needed ppe this has slowed down greatly how many animals can be s/n in our community, which will lead to more kittens. Cats can get pregnant as young as four months old. In an average of 62 days, after mating, the cat will give birth to 1 to 12 kittens, with the average being 4. After giving birth a cat can go into heat anywhere from 1 to 21 weeks later, with the usual being 8 weeks (coinciding with weaning the kittens). A cat has several heat cycles a year and can have kittens 3 or more times per year. This is terrible for your cats health and you won't enjoy it either. Most unfortunate, is uncontrolled breeding results in many unwanted kittens.

What I have described is one of the unintended consequences of the pandemic, from the point of view of an organization that rescues and cares for cats. Just like wearing a mask to protect others, we must all do our part. **IF YOU HAVE AN UNSPAYED/UNNEUTERED CAT AND ARE HAVING TROUBLE GETTING AN APPOINTMENT TO HAVE IT S/N KEEP IT OUT OF HARMS WAY - KEEP IT INSIDE.** The signs of a cat going into heat can be learned by googling "Symptoms of a cat in heat."

Please take good care of your kitty during this difficult time. They are family too!

*Cheryl Wicks is the Co-Founder and President of Sammie's Friends*