

The effect of Coronavirus lockdown on dogs in Coimbatore



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Street dogs are struggling to find food during the lockdown | Photo Credit: [Meeta Ahlawat](#)

The Humane Animal Society and the people from The Pawsome People Project say Coimbatoreans have been largely compassionate towards dogs, both pets and those on the streets

A friend calls frantically. “They say pets will transmit the coronavirus. What do I do about my dogs?” Mini Vasudevan, co-founder of Coimbatore’s Humane Animal Society (HAS), sighs, “It’s 100% false but there’s so much misinformation going around.” Admitting that people, including her staff, were getting scared, she says, “We are working on overcoming that by disseminating correct information.”



Mini Vasudevan of Humane Animal Society (HAS), Coimbatore | Photo Credit: [K Ananthan](#)

HAS is also dealing with panicked calls from people wanting to give up pets. “I haven’t heard of any actual cases of abandonment,” says Mini cautiously. “But there have been calls asking if they can drop off the pets at the shelter. Some threaten to abandon the dogs if we don’t take them in but so far we’ve managed to convince them. For now we’ve closed our out-patient dispensary.”



Megha Jose of The Pawsome People Project | Photo Credit: [Special Arrangement](#)

Megha Jose, founder of The Pawsome People Project, agrees that people are not abandoning pets in the city but “we’ve got calls regarding pets stuck in cages and not being fed. We’re trying to get to those dogs and feed them as the owner can’t reach them.” Speaking of which, Mini brings up pet shops where the animals are kept in tiny cages behind closed doors. “The only agency that can take action is the SPCA and we don’t have one in Coimbatore. I shudder to think of what’s happening behind those closed doors.”



Ahalya Chinnaraj with a street dog | Photo Credit: [Special Arrangement](#)

Pet owners who are not falling for the fear mongering are coping, says Ahalya Chinnaraj, who owns 14 rescued dogs. She takes them for a walk down her street late at night when no one is around. “And wash them down once we’re home.” The bigger problem, according to her, is feeding the street dogs. “Some families, including ours, in Sivananda Colony, Tatabad, would leave food before our houses. Suddenly we’re noticing that there are more dogs.” Megha has an explanation for this. “A few of our volunteers stepped out to feed street dogs and we noticed that they had moved from their original spots. This is probably because they were moving in search of food.”

Ahalya is grateful to a veterinary clinic that donated some bags of commercial dog food. “We’re keeping that for the street dogs. But even for our dogs we’d only stocked up for around a week to 10 days. We didn’t expect a three-week lockdown.”

All three make the same point: street dogs usually congregated around meat stalls or small tea shops or restaurants and found a meal there. But now with all these closed, the dogs are struggling. “In some areas, dogs are howling and crying for food and rummaging through trash cans,” says Megha. “So we’re trying to cover as many areas as possible through our volunteers and feed them. We have appealed to people through our social media handles to feed as many dogs as possible.”

Megha says The Pawsome People Project volunteers have not been stopped in any way – “what’s nice is that the cops in the city are letting us do this and we’ve faced no issues so far”. Ahalya, who is in touch with other volunteers, says they haven’t faced any trouble either. However, Mini has another tale to tell. “Our staff coming to work were stopped. Even when they tried explaining that the veterinary sector comes under the exempt category, they wouldn’t let them go. Even our ambulance was stopped. The police are not accepting our identity cards, so we’re now creating letters with photos for all our staff on the official letterhead. People who are enforcing the law need to be clear about what they are enforcing.”

Megha, Mini and Ahalya also emphasise that these are early days but they have a lot of faith in the people of Coimbatore. “Those who feed these dogs regularly will manage,” says Ahalya, while Mini narrates a story of someone who created a feeder and a water trough for dogs. “Our people are very kind, they will help,” she says confidently.