

Examples of COVID-19 Guidance For Wildlife Research and Domestic Animal Care

Developed by the National Park Service (NPS) Wildlife Health Branch Veterinarians and the Senior Research Scientist

**NPS employees can find more information on InsideNPS [here](#).*

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Scientific Research and Collecting Permits, Permit Holders and Permit Applicants

Changes in park operations mean some parks have reduced or ceased processing of applications for Scientific Research and Collecting Permits during the coronavirus response period. Scientists submitting permit applications should not expect a rapid response and may be requested to submit additional information. Additionally, park conditions may change, permittee access to parks may be adjusted, so possession of a signed Scientific Research and Collecting Permit does not in itself guarantee access to all areas authorized under the permit. Please check with individual park research coordinators to inquire about fieldwork status and guidance. Park contact information is available from the RPRS Search menu: see the "Parks" search option.

Field Work Involving Bats

(updated June 4)

What's the issue?

There is potential risk for bats to be infected with SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19 in humans) via handling or being in close proximity to an infected human. If this were to occur, the consequences for health of bats and subsequent risks for human health if a persistent reservoir of the virus was established in bat populations is unknown. A rapid risk assessment lead by the USGS and FWS in collaboration with multiple experts, agencies and institutions nationally and internationally indicated that there is a non-negligible risk of bats becoming infected with SARS-CoV-2 from research or management personnel who handle or are in close proximity (within 6 ft) of bats and that proper use of PPE can substantially reduce that risk. However, a great deal of uncertainty still exists as to as to the susceptibility of North American bat species to SARS-CoV-2 and the potential consequences if bats are infected. Experimental infection trials in North American bat species are underway to directly assess susceptibility to infection, development of disease and potential for bat-bat transmission. Outcomes of these infection trials will provide the empirical data needed to better assess the true risk and possible consequences. Until more information is available, it is important that we consider these potential risks associated with activities requiring direct handling or close proximity to bats and continue taking precautions to minimize those risks as much as possible.

Current Recommendation

Avoid handling or being in close proximity (within 6 ft) of bats unless necessary for protection of human health and safety or for high priority purposes. Determining priority purposes depends on careful consideration of the risks and benefits associated with any activities that require close contact with bats and the ability to implement appropriate mitigation measures to reduce risks as much as possible. This discussion should include all parties involved and should be done in consultation with an NPS Wildlife Veterinarian.

References

Runge, M.C., Grant, E.H.C., Coleman, J.T.H., Reichard, J.D., Gibbs, S.E.J., Cryan, P.M., Olival, K.J., Walsh, D.P., Belhert, D.S., Hopkins, M.C., and Sleeman, J.M., 2020, **Assessing the risks posed by SARS-CoV-2 in and via North American bats—Decision framing and rapid risk**

assessment: U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report 2020–1060, 43 p., <https://doi.org/10.3133/ofr20201060>

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/bats/bats-and-covid-19.htm>

Wildlife Health

(updated June 30)

Wildlife health surveillance and disease monitoring is an essential function necessary for parks to preserve natural resources within NPS lands. However, COVID-19 may change if and when certain activities can be accomplished and requires additional planning to conduct wildlife health work. The NPS Biological Resources Division hosts a Wildlife Health Branch and Veterinary Diagnostic Service that provides veterinary consultation and disease investigation and diagnostic services to support parks. The Wildlife Health Branch is closely monitoring information on SARS-CoV-2 and implications it may have for wildlife and domestic animals.

Recent reports have indicated that several species of the families Mustelidae, Felidae, and Canidae are susceptible to infection by SARS-CoV-2, the causative agent of COVID-19. Research suggests dogs are not as easily infected with the virus as cats and ferrets. More studies are needed to understand if and how different animals could be affected by SARS-CoV-2 and what risks infected animals may pose to humans or other animals. The CDC has the most current information about [SARS-CoV-2 in animals](#).

The potential for transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus to free-ranging wildlife is unknown at this time. If you have urgent field work that involves close contact with live free-ranging wildlife in NPS units we suggest taking basic precautions including:

- Monitor yourself for symptoms (i.e., fever, cough, shortness of breath), follow public health guidance on [quarantine](#) following any possible exposures to COVID-19, and stay at home if you are sick.
- If you have a fever or respiratory symptoms, refrain from handling wildlife until you can discontinue home isolation according to [current CDC guidance](#).
- Practice good hand hygiene.
- Wear gloves and dedicated clothing when handling wildlife.
- Wear a cloth face covering or other barrier that covers your nose and mouth to prevent respiratory droplets being transferred to people or animals nearby. Face coverings should be laundered daily or after each use.
- Clean and [disinfect](#) high touch surfaces often.
- Work outdoors or in a well-ventilated area if possible.

This guidance is based on preliminary and incomplete information available to date and may change as our knowledge evolves. These recommendations are to be applied in concert with all CDC and local public health recommendations and restrictions for social distancing between humans. Please remain flexible in your wildlife handling plans this season and watch for updated guidance and recommendations as more information becomes available.

Routine testing for the virus in free-living or captive North American wildlife species is not currently recommended, but there may be situations in which testing should be considered.

Refer to [CDC guidelines for testing wildlife](#) and contact a member of the NPS Wildlife Health Branch if you believe a wildlife species in your park meets these criteria.

If you have research, disease surveillance or management activities planned involving **felid or mustelid species**, please reach out to a member of the NPS Wildlife Health Branch.

Useful Links:

- [Centers for Disease Control FAQs on Animals and COVID-19](#)
- [European Association of Zoo Veterinaries FAQs on SARS-COV-2 in wild and zoo animals](#)
- [World Organization for Animal Health FAQs on COVID-19](#)

- [OIE Considerations for sampling, testing, and reporting of SARS-CoV-2 in animals](#)
- [Curated literature hub for tracking up-to-date scientific information on COVID-19](#)

Domestic and Captive Animals

(updated June 30)

To date, there have been no reported infections of SARS-CoV-2 in livestock in the US. However, given isolated cases of SARS-CoV-2 infections in [pets](#) and scientific studies suggesting that some domestic animal species, including cats, dogs, and ferrets, may be susceptible to infection, basic precautions are recommended when handling captive animals. The [US Department of Agriculture](#)(USDA) and [American Veterinary Medical Association](#)(AVMA) have compiled current information and recommendations for caring for and handling animals during the pandemic. Routine testing for [SARS-CoV-2 in animals](#) is not recommended.

For any personnel caring for captive animals used in cultural displays, education and interpretive programs, or working and service animals (hereafter known as “animals”) in NPS units we recommend basic precautions including:

- Monitor yourself for symptoms (i.e., fever, cough, shortness of breath), follow public health guidance on [quarantine](#) following any possible exposures to COVID-19, and stay at home if you are sick.
- If you have a fever or respiratory symptoms, refrain from handling or caring for animals until you can discontinue home isolation according to [current CDC guidance](#).
- Practice good hand hygiene.
- Wear gloves and dedicated clothing when handling or caring for captive animals.
- Wear a cloth face covering or other barrier that covers your nose and mouth to prevent respiratory droplets being transferred to people or animals nearby. Face coverings should be laundered daily or after each use.
- Clean and [disinfect](#) high touch surfaces such as sinks and counters often.
- Work outdoors or in a well-ventilated area if possible.
- If an animal you care for is sick, contact your local attending veterinarian and they can advise on appropriate testing and treatment.

This guidance is based on preliminary and incomplete information available to date and may change as our knowledge evolves. These recommendations are to be applied in concert with all CDC and local public health recommendations and restrictions for social distancing between humans. Please remain flexible in your animal care and handling plans this season and watch for updated guidance and recommendations as more information becomes available. If you have questions pertaining to your specific animal care or handling situation, please reach out to a member of the NPS Wildlife Health Branch.