

FAQs about COVID-19 & Wildlife for Wildlife Handlers



There are still many unknowns about COVID-19, especially as it relates to wildlife. However, the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission compiled information to address frequently asked questions the agency is receiving from members of the public that handle wildlife (e.g., licensed trappers, wildlife control agents, ACOs, researchers, captive wildlife facilities). For bats, please refer to the pdf "[Bat Activities During COVID-19.](#)"

1. Can captive or non-captive wildlife spread COVID-19 to people or pets?

- a. While a captive Malayan tiger tested positive for COVID-19, there is currently no evidence of the COVID-19 virus circulating in the free-ranging (non-captive) wildlife in the United States or that wildlife might be a source of infection for people in the United States.
- b. There is no evidence that COVID-19 can spread to people from skin or fur.
- c. At this time, there is no evidence that animals play a significant role in spreading the virus that causes COVID-19. Based on the limited information available to date, the risk of animals spreading COVID-19 to people is considered to be low.

2. Can people spread COVID-19 to captive wildlife?

- a. We are still learning about this virus, but we know it is primarily spreading from person-to-person and it appears that it can spread from people to animals in some situations.
- b. The first case of a non-domestic animal testing positive for the virus that causes COVID-19 was a tiger with a respiratory illness at a zoo in New York City. Samples from this tiger were collected and tested after several lions and tigers at the zoo showed signs of respiratory illness. Public health officials believe these large cats became sick after being exposed to a zoo employee who was infected with the virus that causes COVID-19.
- c. See below for what steps you can take to reduce the risk of transmitting COVID-19 to captive wildlife.

3. Can people spread COVID-19 to non-captive wildlife?

- a. It is not currently known whether COVID-19 has the potential to infect non-captive wildlife. Disease and wildlife experts with the U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other organizations are currently working to assess these risks. As more becomes known, experts from these agencies will release further guidance.
- b. If a wild animal were to become infected with the virus, we don't know whether the infection could then spread among wildlife. Further studies are needed to understand if and how wildlife could be affected by COVID-19.
- c. When handling any wildlife, you should always wear a mask and gloves to protect yourself and the animal.

4. What can I do to protect myself and wild animals from infection?

- a. Stay informed about the local COVID-19 situation and know where to turn for reliable, up-to-date information in your local community. Below are some resources for credible information:
 - i. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#COVID-19-and-Animals>
 - ii. <https://aawv.net/coronavirus-pandemic/>
 - iii. <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/COVID-19/sars-cov-2-animals-including-pets>
 - iv. <https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/COVID-19>

- b. Take extra precautions against virus transmission when working with wildlife, especially captive wildlife and animals from the families Felidae and Mustelidae. These include:
- i. Review personal protective equipment (PPE) management and disinfection protocols. This includes potential fomites such as food bowls and enrichment items. Fomites are objects or materials that are likely to carry infection.
 - ii. If available, wear appropriate PPE (gloves, masks, eye protection). PPE resources are constrained due to demands in the human healthcare setting. Use your professional judgement in determining appropriate PPE use. The American Veterinary Medical Association and the CDC offer some guidance on optimizing supplies and using PPE appropriately.
 - https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/COVID-19/guidelines-ppe-COVID-19-pandemic-demand-exceeds?utm_source=email-mem&utm_medium=coronavirus200323&utm_campaign=coronavirus&utm_term=link&utm_content=ppe-guidelines
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/ppe-strategy/index.html>
 - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/using-ppe.html>
 - iii. Wash hands before and after interacting with an animal.
 - iv. Disinfect capture equipment (e.g., traps, catch poles) between each animal capture if possible, especially if you are releasing non-target wild animals. This will not only reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection for you and wildlife, but also will reduce the risk of infecting wildlife with more common wildlife diseases, such as rabies and canine distemper.
 - v. Surfaces in the clinic that are touched frequently, such as workstations, keyboards, doorknobs, countertops, cages, cage handles, light switches, and any wildlife handling equipment, should be cleaned often and wiped down with disposable wipes between cleanings.
 - vi. Provide no-touch disposal receptacles.
 - vii. Place hand sanitizers in multiple to encourage hand hygiene.
 - viii. Limit staff access to wildlife holding areas.
 - ix. Limit volunteers/staff on each shift

Sources of information used in this document:

<https://www.avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/covid-19/sars-cov-2-animals-including-pets>

<https://myfwc.com/media/23467/covid-animal-ppe-memo.pdf>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/veterinarians.html#cleaning-disinfection>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/animals.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html#COVID-19-and-Animals>

<https://www.wildlifedisease.org/wda/Portals/0/Covid-19%20Information/Felid%20Taxon%20Advisory%20Group%20COVID-19%20recommendations%20for%20participating%20institutions.pdf>