

2021 NCWRC Protocols for Bat Handling Surveys During COVID-19 Pandemic



When planning field work with bats, first consider whether data collection for project goals could be accomplished using non-contact methods (i.e., acoustics, roost surveys, guano collection). Also, consider delaying contact surveys to 2022, if possible. See the [“Minimize” Step of the IUCN Bat Specialist Group Strategy for Researchers](#) and the [CDC Hierarchy of Controls to Reduce the Risk of SARS-CoV-2 Spreading between People and Wildlife](#) for more information and justification for using alternative methods or delaying contact surveys.

If data collection using contact methods is necessary for essential and time-sensitive projects, permittees must adhere to the following protocols:

1. Reduce contact surveys to the greatest extent possible by limiting the number of netting nights (or other capture surveys) to the minimum amount needed to accomplish project goals.
2. Use the smallest team of surveyors possible for conducting the survey. Avoid inviting spectators or volunteers.
3. Keep a consistent team of surveyors and avoid changing personnel more than necessary.
4. Follow routine screening before each survey. Anyone who has experienced the following must avoid activity with bats:
 - a. Diagnosis with COVID-19 in the last 14 days
 - b. Symptoms of COVID-19 (fever, cough, fatigue, loss of smell and taste) in the last 14 days
 - c. Contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 or showing symptoms in the last 14 days
5. In addition to following the [National White-nose Syndrome Decontamination Protocol](#), surveyors must wear additional PPE and follow additional protocols for reducing risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission to bats.
6. To reduce **Aerosol Exposure**:
 - a. Wear an [FDA-approved mask](#) throughout the entire survey, except during breaks for eating and drinking. This mask should be disposed of after the survey because of potential WNS contamination.
 - b. Wear an additional mask (i.e., fabric, surgical) over the FDA-approved mask. This mask should be disposed of or decontaminated following the National WNS Decontamination Protocols after the survey.
 - c. **Do not blow on bats.** Use a nasal aspirator to blow a puff of air to part fur or to stop biting.
7. To reduce **Contact Exposure**:
 - a. Wash hands or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol at the start of work before
 - b. Wear latex or nitrile gloves when handling bats and equipment that will contact bats and change gloves between each bat.
 - c. Adjusting your mask, touching your face, sneezing or coughing can contaminate your gloves, so only wear gloves when checking nets and handling bats or equipment. Use hand sanitizer before putting on gloves. Do not contaminate your leather bat handling gloves since these can't be easily disinfected on site.
 - d. Try to avoid touching your face or mask. Use hand sanitizer or change your gloves if you do touch your face or mask. You can use hand sanitizer on your latex/nitrile gloves, but it must dry before touching bats. Also use hand sanitizer after bathroom breaks and after eating or drinking.

8. Each captured bat should be handled by only one surveyor from the time of capture to the time of release. Other surveyors should keep a distance of 6 ft. or greater as often as possible.
9. Define a separate space for surveyors to eat and drink away from bats and equipment that will contact bats. Do not eat or drink while wearing gloves.
10. Keep track of all contact activities and personnel involved. Alert the NCWRC if a surveyor could have exposed bats to SARS-CoV-2.

Resources:

FDA-approved masks: <https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19-emergency-use-authorizations-medical-devices/personal-protective-equipment-euas#appendixa>

CDC Guidance for Reducing the Risk of SARS-CoV-2 Spreading between People and Wildlife: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/wildlife.html>

IUCN SSC Bat Specialist Group (BSG) Recommended Strategy for Researchers to Reduce the Risk of Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from Humans to Bats: https://www.iucnbsg.org/uploads/6/5/0/9/6509077/map_recommendations_for_researchers_v_1.0_final.pdf

EPA List of Disinfectants for COVID-19: <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-coronavirus-covid-19>

National White-nose Syndrome Decontamination Protocol: <https://s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/prod-is-cms-assets/wns/prod/56f60a70-0e5b-11eb-8166-337c3d472ee8-Final-October2020%20revised%20WNS%20Decon%20Protocol-with%20cover%20letter.pdf>