

2021 NCWRC Protocols for Bat Rehabilitation During COVID-19 Pandemic



In addition to following the [Acceptable Management Practices for Rehabilitating Bats Affected by White-nose Syndrome](#) to reduce the risk of spreading the fungus that causes White-nose Syndrome, rehabilitators must wear additional PPE and follow additional protocols for reducing the risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission to bats. The following guidance has been adapted from the [IUCN Recommendations to Reduce the Risk of Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from Humans to Bats in Bat Rescue and Rehabilitation Centers](#) and the [CDC Reducing the Risk of SARS-CoV-2 Spreading between People and Wildlife](#).

Capture and Transport:

1. When possible, discourage members of the public from submitting bats.
2. Ask the person who found the bat if they have experienced the following and record this information:
 - 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
3. Instruct the person submitting the bat to avoid holding the bat in the hand and to wear a face mask when capturing the bat. If capture by hand is necessary, wearing thick leather gloves and not holding the bat for longer than necessary is recommended. Gloves should be [disinfected](#) before touching the bat.
4. The bat should be contained in a disposable cardboard box that prevents escape for transport.

Holding and Treatment:

1. 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
2. Practice social distancing and keep the number of personnel coming into contact with bats to a minimum. Avoid changing personnel more often than necessary.
3. Keep track of all contact activities and personnel involved. This should include personnel name, date of contact, bat interacted with, and duration of interaction. Keep interactions to the minimum number and duration possible.
4. To reduce **Aerosol Exposure**:
 - a. Wear an [FDA-approved mask](#) when in a room or other enclosed space with a bat or when within 6 ft of a bat outdoors.
 - b. Wear an additional mask (i.e., fabric, surgical) over the FDA-approved mask.
 - c. **Do not blow on bats**. Use a nasal aspirator to blow a puff of air to part fur or to stop biting.
 - d. Improve facility ventilation by following [CDC COVID-19 ventilation guidance](#).
5. To reduce **Contact Exposure**:
 - a. Wash hands or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol at the start of work before touching any equipment that will contact bats, before and after physical contact with bats, before putting on PPE, after taking off PPE, after cleaning or sterilizing equipment, and after using the bathroom.

- b. Wear latex or nitrile gloves when handling bats and equipment that will contact bats and change gloves between contact with bats in separate enclosures.
 - c. Adjusting your mask, touching your face, sneezing or coughing can contaminate your gloves, so change your gloves or use hand sanitizer if you touch your face or mask. You can use hand sanitizer on your gloves, but it must dry before touching bats.
 - d. Only one bat should be held in each bag, cage, or container. Exceptions to this are groups of pups, a pup and its mother, and bats from the same roost. Enclosures should be kept at least 6 ft. apart.
 - e. Wash and disinfect all equipment that comes in contact with bats before use (e.g. cages, bowls, tweezers, pipettes, syringes). Disinfectants can be harmful to bats, so wash and dry equipment and surfaces after disinfecting and do not spray disinfectants near bats.
 - f. Use a footbath containing an [EPA-listed disinfectant](#) at entrances and exits to areas housing bats and scrub any organic material off shoes for proper disinfection. Change footbath solution at least once daily.
 - g. Wear dedicated clothing and footwear that can be laundered after shifts or disposed of.
6. Isolate bats showing respiratory or gastrointestinal symptoms and contact a veterinarian and the NCWRC.

Release:

1. Alert the NCWRC if a bat could have been exposed to SARS-CoV-2.
2. If a bat could have been exposed to SARS-CoV-2, isolate the bat from others and wait to release the bat until approved by the NCWRC.

Resources:

IUCN SSC Bat Specialist Group (BSG) Recommendations to Reduce the Risk of Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from Humans to Bats in Bat Rescue and Rehabilitation Center:

https://www.iucnbsg.org/uploads/6/5/0/9/6509077/recommendations_rehab_draft1.pdf

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>

EPA List of Disinfectants for COVID-19:

<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-coronavirus-covid-19>

Acceptable Management Practices for Rehabilitating Bats Affected by White-nose Syndrome:

https://s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/prod-is-cms-assets/wns/prod/dd829050-b1d2-11e8-87bb-317452edc988-20180820_Rehab%20AMPs_August%202018_FINAL%20formatted.pdf

CDC COVID-19 Ventilation Guidance: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/ventilation.html>