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APHIS Partners With Greenville Zoo on Zoo and Aquarium Serology Study

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Veterinarians with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) recently partnered with the Greenville Zoo in Greenville, South Carolina, to gather information for the Zoo and Aquarium Serology Study.

WATCH: [APHIS Partners with Greenville Zoo on Zoo and Aquarium Serology Study](#)

While at the zoo, the team completed a survey to assess the zoo's SARS-CoV-2 biosecurity practices.

"APHIS is here to talk about some of the changes we had to make when COVID restrictions went into place, to make our animal collection, staff and guests safer here at the zoo," said James Traverse, Greenville Zoo General Curator.

The team uses a standardized tool, which is an assessment of each facility's characteristics and its practices used to protect their guests, workers and animals. The team has used the biosecurity tool at 60 zoos and aquariums across the country. Providing a consistent approach to biosecurity will help build a framework to understand how humans, animals and environments depend on each other. This will ultimately help zoos and aquariums become better prepared for the future to

help prevent or minimize the impact of the next zoonotic disease outbreak or global pandemic.

“When we show up to facilities and tell them we’re working for USDA, they are very excited,” said Dr. Jessica Siegal-Willott, Senior Veterinary Medical Officer, APHIS Zoological Species Specialist. “They are really happy that someone is in this space and performing this work.”

Prior to the survey, the zoo had done several exams on their animals and shared the data and samples with APHIS to identify if any of the animals were exposed to SARS-CoV-2. Sharing samples helps APHIS identify the range of species that may be susceptible to SARS-CoV-2.

“We hope that the guidance that we come up with can help people protect their animals and protect the people that work there,” said Dr. Steve Rekant, APHIS SARS-CoV-2 Coordinator.

While experts are still learning about SARS-CoV-2 in animals, there is currently no evidence that animals play a significant role in spreading the virus to humans. Based on the limited information available to date, the risk of animals spreading SARS-CoV-2 to people is low.

APHIS is currently conducting [multiple projects](#) under the American Rescue Plan Act aimed at understanding how the SARS-CoV-2 virus behaves in different animals, how it moves between animals and people and what we and our public health partners can do to interrupt the chain of transmission. APHIS’ American Rescue Plan [strategic framework](#) outlines how the agency is focusing its efforts to prevent, detect, investigate and respond to SARS-CoV-2 in animals, as well as other emerging diseases that could pose a threat to humans and animals.

“Partnerships are critical for APHIS,” said Rekant. “At the federal level, we can’t do this type of work on our own.”

Photo: U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service veterinarians and Greenville Zoo officials gather input for the Zoo and Aquarium Serology Study project funded under the American Rescue Plan Act. (Photo by Travis Weger, USDA APHIS)

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