



Animal Care Tech Note

Guidance for Zoos and Captive Wildlife Facilities: Protecting Susceptible Animals From SARS-CoV-2 Infection



While SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) spreads mainly from person to person, it can also infect certain susceptible animals. This includes dogs and cats, nondomestic big cats, nonhuman primates, ferrets, and mink, among others. Natural infections have occurred in captive gorillas, Asian small-clawed otters, several big cat species at zoos and sanctuaries, and in farmed mink after being exposed to animal caretakers with COVID-19. Other animals (other nonhuman primates, as well as ferrets, deer mice, white-tailed deer, raccoon dogs, and tree shrews) have shown they are susceptible to infection under laboratory conditions. In addition, SARS-CoV-2 antibodies have been found in some populations of free-ranging white-tailed deer. As research progresses, we continue learning more about if and how SARS-CoV-2 affects different species.

The following guidance is intended as a general aid for zoos and captive wildlife facilities that house susceptible animals.



Standard Practices and Procedures

Preventing infection—among facility staff and between facility staff and animals—is important. Facilities can establish policies and procedures that reduce the risk of disease spread. Examples include:

- Non-punitive sick leave policies for people with COVID-19 symptoms
- Minimizing contact with susceptible animals
- Standard operating procedures for disinfecting enclosures and utensils used to feed animals
- Training staff on proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE)

For more examples and information on this topic, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention online at www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/wildlife.html.

Preventing SARS-CoV-2 Spread Between the Public and Animals

Animals may be best protected by:

- Asking the public to wear a face mask at the facility
- Ensuring that members of the public cannot come within 6 feet of nonhuman primates, nondomestic big cats, and all species of mustelids (e.g., ferrets, mink, otters)
- Suspending hands-on encounters with any of the SARS-CoV-2-susceptible animals

While there's no current evidence that contact with animal fur can spread SARS-CoV-2, we are still learning about this virus and the COVID-19 disease.

Learn More

If you have questions about protecting animals at your facility from SARS-CoV-2, contact our Animal Care staff at (970) 494-7478 or animalcare@usda.gov. For more information on SARS-CoV-2 and animals, including the latest research on susceptible species, go to:

- www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/animals.html
- www.aphis.usda.gov/aphis/ourfocus/animalhealth/SA_One_Health/sars-cov-2-animals-us