

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife  
Requirements for rehabilitation of bats in Washington during SARS-CoV-2 (Covid19) Pandemic  
3 April 2020

**To protect Washington's native bat populations, WDFW is providing the following guidance regarding bat rehabilitation in Washington State. This guidance is in place immediately and until further notice.**

1. Bats that are currently in care may not be released until further notice.
2. Strong recommendation to cease the intake of bats for any reason.
  - a. In the event a bat is taken into rehabilitation, it may not be released until further notice.
  - b. Please be advised, that pending the recommendations from the expert working group, bats in rehabilitation may be required to be euthanized.
3. If a member of the public brings a bat into your rehabilitation facility, consider immediate euthanasia upon intake.
  - a. If there is a possible human exposure to rabies, please consult with the [local health jurisdiction](#) and ensure appropriate action(s) are taken to address all rabies exposure concerns.
4. If a member of the public calls about a sick or injured bat, instruct them not to directly touch the bat and leave it where it is. If there has been a possible human exposure (rabies risk) refer to the local health jurisdiction.
  - a. Strong recommendation that all humans remain at least 6 feet from live bats (as per the CDC recommendations for social distancing).
5. If a staff member is ill or exhibiting signs of COVID19, do not allow them to work with or near bats.
  - a. Take appropriate actions to minimize contact with bats in care and adhere to social distancing guidelines, as recommended by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, between not only humans but also humans and bats.
  - b. *We recommend this under the assumption that SARS-CoV-2 could be passed from a human to a bat in a similar manner as it is between humans. Therefore, appropriate social distancing and use of PPE should help minimize transmission of SARS-CoV-2.*
6. If there are questions, please do not hesitate to contact WDFW: Katie Haman – [Katherine.haman@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:Katherine.haman@dfw.wa.gov); Kristin Mansfield – [Kristin.mansfield@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:Kristin.mansfield@dfw.wa.gov); Abby Tobin – [Abigail.tobin@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:Abigail.tobin@dfw.wa.gov); Patricia Thompson – [patricia.thompson@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:patricia.thompson@dfw.wa.gov).

**Background and Status (as of 3 April 2020)**

There is much unknown about SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID19). Experts agree that it likely originated from bats in China. The role of other mammalian intermediate host(s) in the initial transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from bats to humans remains unknown. Regardless, it is generally agreed that Asian bats serve as natural reservoir hosts (primary host harboring a pathogen and serving as an ongoing source of transmission/infection) for SARS-like viruses. Such a role for North American bats with SARS-like coronavirus remains unknown at this time but is actively being investigated.

Another looming unknown is the risk of potential back-transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from humans (with COVID19) to North American bats, as is the susceptibility of our bats to the virus itself, or other similar coronaviruses. Given these unknowns and the potential negative impacts on North American bat

populations already stressed due to threats from white-nose syndrome (WNS), it is critical that we take immediate action(s) to protect our bats. Bats play a vital role in our ecosystem, providing services such as pest control (e.g., mosquitoes, defoliating moths), therefore, it's important to safeguard North American bats from the potential threat of SARS-CoV-2 and by doing so also protect humans.

A working group of experts convened by our federal partners will provide within the next several weeks a risk assessment to determine the probability of North American bats contracting the virus (SARS-CoV-2), possible population impacts, and the potential to serve as reservoir hosts. A direct outcome will be information-based recommendations for handling native bats (and other wildlife) in North America to reduce potential risks associated with SARS-CoV-2. In the meantime the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other federal and state agencies are postponing all activities that involve handling wild bats until further notice. Therefore, WDFW is providing similar temporary measures regarding the rehabilitation and handling of live wild bats in Washington. This is done in an abundance of caution and until we have a better understanding of the complexities of SARS-CoV-2 transmission and infection(s) in both humans and North American wildlife, especially bats.

Upon receiving and reviewing guidance-based recommendations from the working group of experts, WDFW will update these measures accordingly.

**For more information**

- USGS National Wildlife Health Center [Wildlife Health Bulletin \(2020-003\)](#), with information on coronaviruses in wildlife
- [CDC latest information on COVID19 associated risks for animals](#)
- American Veterinary Medical Association [COVID19 website](#)