



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Matthew Strickler
Secretary of Natural Resources

Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

Ryan J. Brown
Executive Director

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Dear Virginia Animal Control Officers,

The Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) recognizes the important services you provide to the public, especially during the past 12 months. I hope this letter finds you doing well as the Commonwealth continues to try and navigate a safe course through this public health crisis. The DWR has been able to continue its mission to conserve and protect Virginia's wildlife resources in spite of the challenges we have faced over the last year. As such, we have remained very busy keeping up with a variety of different emerging diseases of wildlife, including COVID-19, *Echinococcus multilocularis*, and rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus serotype 2 (RHDV2). Because of these emerging diseases of concern, the DWR has developed new Certified Nuisance Animal Permit (CNAP) and Wildlife Rehabilitation Permit conditions aimed at minimizing the risk of disease transmission between wildlife and humans (and vice versa) and minimizing the risk of disease spread as animals or carcasses are moved to new locations. The DWR is also requesting your help in achieving these goals.

Research investigating COVID-19 and potential effects on wildlife species has been on-going over the last 12 months. While some species, such as big brown bats, have shown limited susceptibility to COVID-19, other species, such as white-tailed deer, domestic cats, tigers, and mink have been confirmed to be highly susceptible. The susceptibility of other wildlife species to COVID-19 is largely unknown at this time. Within the last four months, *E. multilocularis*, a tapeworm of canines that is capable of infecting humans, has been detected in wild foxes from Clarke and Loudoun counties. This is the first time that *E. multilocularis* has been detected in Virginia wildlife. Lastly, we remain vigilant in regards to RHDV2. The nearest RHDV2 confirmation in domestic rabbits occurred in December in Florida and the closest known detection in wild rabbits occurred in eastern Colorado. Taking into account this new disease landscape, new permit conditions have been developed for a variety of permits and species. These new permit conditions are effective immediately and will remain in effect until further notice. To be consistent with guidance provided to wildlife rehabilitators and CNAPs, we are requesting your cooperation in the areas described below.

Key definitions:

Disinfection consists of the removal of organic debris with soap and water, rinsing, drying, spraying with or submerging in a 10% bleach solution (1/2 cup 6% or 8.25% household bleach in 1 gallon of water) for at least 10 minutes, a second rinse, and drying before use.

Disposal of carcasses is defined as burial (at least two feet), incineration, or landfill (after double-bagging) for animals not euthanized with sodium pentobarbital. Animals euthanized with sodium pentobarbital must be incinerated.

E. multi zone is delineated as the area that includes the counties in which *Echinococcus multilocularis* has been found and a buffer around these counties, including Clarke, Fairfax, Fauquier, Frederick, Loudoun, Prince William, and Warren counties.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is defined as consisting of (at minimum) disposable or reusable gloves that can be decontaminated and a mask (e.g., surgical or homemade cloth mask) or respirator (e.g., N95 mask with no vents).

Standard COVID response protocol consists of discontinuation of direct and indirect contact between mammalian wildlife and staff that tests positive for COVID-19 or has been exposed to another person who tests positive for the virus until their self-quarantine or isolation period has ended.

Bats - COVID-19 risk reduction

1. PPE is required when entering an active bat roost site or performing any work that may result in direct contact (e.g. handling, capture, etc.) with bats. Non-disposable PPE, including gloves, masks, and filters, must be decontaminated between jobs.
2. Bats captured in a human dwelling or handled by permittees may be released once potential for exposure to rabies by a human or domestic pet has been ruled out. Bats that are injured, sick, or orphaned may be transported to a permitted wildlife rehabilitator.
3. Standard COVID response protocol shall be followed.

All other mammals prescribed to be released or transported to a permitted wildlife rehabilitator – COVID-19 risk reduction

1. PPE is required for all direct and indirect contact.
2. Standard COVID response protocol shall be followed.

Additional required protocols for specific mammal species are listed below.

Cottontails – RHDV2 risk reduction

1. Disinfection of equipment (box traps, carriers, etc.) is required.
2. Appropriate disposal of carcasses is required.
3. If interacting with domestic rabbits after handling wild cottontails (and vice versa), a shower and change of clothes between interactions is strongly recommended.
4. No release of trapped cottontails is allowed.

Grey and Red Foxes and Coyotes – *E. multilocularis* risk reduction

1. Disinfection of equipment (traps, carriers, etc.) is required.
2. Appropriate disposal of carcasses is required.
3. Disposition conditions:
 - a. **Fox pups originating from *E. multi* zone:**
 - i. **Collected from the wild before June 1:** No restrictions
 - ii. **Collected from the wild after June 1:**
 1. **Rehabilitation:** May only transport to permitted rehabilitators located in *E. multi* zone.
 2. **Humane dispatch:** Transport out of *E. multi* zone allowed only for immediate humane dispatch and proper disposal.
 3. **Immediate release:** May only occur on the same property as capture (no relocation).
 - b. **Adult foxes originating from *E. multi* zone:**
 - i. **Rehabilitation:** May only transport to permitted rehabilitators located in *E. multi* zone.
 - ii. **Humane dispatch:** Transport out of *E. multi* zone allowed only for immediate humane dispatch and proper disposal.
 - iii. **Immediate release:** May only occur on the same property as capture (no relocation).

For the purposes of reducing potential COVID-19 transmission from humans to wildlife, please continue to adhere to the guidance provided below.

- Wash your hands often and thoroughly for at least 30 seconds using soap/water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Touch the mask/ventilator only when wearing clean gloves.
 - Discard the mask immediately if it becomes visibly soiled.
- Wear disposable gloves or decontaminate gloves after use with an alcohol-based solution containing at least 70% alcohol, bleach solution, or EPA-registered disinfectant.

DWR encourages all Animal Control Officers to obtain a COVID-19 vaccine. While the vaccine has been proven to decrease the risk of illness or hospitalization as a result of COVID-19 infection, it has not yet been proven to eliminate infection and shedding of the virus by an asymptomatic carrier. As such, in order to minimize the chance of viral transmission from humans to wildlife, your vaccination status shall not affect adherence to PPE guidelines. Your actions matter and your diligence in reducing the risk of viral transmission to wildlife is greatly appreciated.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation during these challenging times. Up-to-date information on reducing the risks associated with wildlife diseases and a copy of this letter can be found at <https://dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/diseases/information-for-dwr-permittees/>. The DWR greatly appreciates the important services you provide to the public and your role in helping manage wildlife for the benefit of all Virginia citizens. Please continue to keep yourself and your family safe while exercising measures to protect humans and wildlife during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,



Ryan Brown
Executive Director