

Looking out for the Commonwealth's wildlife is at the heart of our mission at the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources.

Each spring, we make an appeal to leave baby wildlife alone. This spring, we have an additional request.

While no evidence that the virus that causes COVID-19 is circulating in wildlife here in Kentucky or anywhere in the United States has been found, scientists right now are working to determine if the virus can be passed from people to our native wildlife.

The virus that causes COVID-19 is suspected to have originated in bats from southwest China. Preliminary experimental infections studies indicate that wild cats and small carnivorous mammals like weasels, mink and otters are susceptible to infection. The confirmed COVID-19 infection in lions and tigers at a zoo in New York and two pet cats support the previously mentioned findings.

Until the experts know more about the risk this disease could pose to our native wildlife, we are asking for your help - and your cooperation.

Out of an abundance of caution, we ask that you please refrain from handling ***all live*** native wildlife, and their young.

In these times of uncertainty, we understand you may have more questions and we hope to address some of them here.

Can I get COVID-19 from wildlife?

There have been no documented cases of any native wildlife transmitting the virus that causes COVID-19 to people. Studies are currently underway to determine which of Kentucky's wildlife (if any) could be susceptible to the virus.

As always, wildlife should be enjoyed from a distance, and people shouldn't handle live wild animals. Don't feed wildlife by hand or touch wildlife droppings. And, please, wash your hands and supervise children washing their hands after working or playing outside.

As a hunter, can I still process and consume wild game meat?

Currently, according to the CDC, there is no evidence to suggest the virus that causes COVID-19 is circulating in our native wildlife here in the United States, or that wildlife might be a source of infection for people in the United States.

We recommend taking the same precautions that you normally would when processing and preparing your harvested wild game. Do not harvest or handle animals that appear sick or

unhealthy. Wear latex or rubber gloves. Thoroughly clean hands and sanitize tools. And cook game meats to the recommended temperatures.

There have been reports of pets contracting coronavirus. What should I do?

Kentucky Fish and Wildlife is tasked with managing native *wildlife*.

For questions regarding human-to-pet transmission of the virus that causes COVID-19, contact your vet or follow the CDC's recommendations at <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/animals.html>.

These recommendations include the following:

- Do NOT let pets interact with people or animals from outside the household.
- Keep cats indoors to prevent them from interacting with other animals or people.
- If a person inside the household becomes sick, isolate that person from everyone else, including pets.

Are bats in Kentucky at risk?

Many bat species in Kentucky have been impacted by White Nose Syndrome, a fungal infection not related to COVID-19. The white-nose fungus is exclusive to bats and has caused significant declines in Kentucky's bat populations. With these impacts, we are being very cautious about the potential transmission of this coronavirus to Kentucky's bat population.

Studies are currently underway to see if people can transmit the COVID-19 coronavirus to bats. Until we receive the results of this study, we're limiting direct contact between people and bats, including rehabilitation and research.

If bats in the United States can get the virus that causes COVID-19, can they spread it back to people?

Other coronaviruses have been found in North American bats in the past, but there is currently no evidence that the virus that causes COVID-19 is present in any free-living wildlife in the United States, including bats.

In general, coronaviruses do not cause illness or death in bats, but we don't yet know if this new coronavirus would make North American species of bats sick.

Bats are an important part of natural ecosystems, and their populations are already declining in the United States. Bat populations could be further threatened by the disease itself or by harm inflicted on bats resulting from a misconception that bats are spreading COVID-19.

However, there is no evidence that bats in the United States are a source of the virus that causes COVID-19 for people. Further studies are needed to understand if and how bats could be affected by COVID-19.

What diseases can bats transmit to people?

Primarily rabies and histoplasmosis.

From this perspective, bats have always posed a small (but significant) threat to human health and safety. Bats should never be handled by the public for any reason.

I think I have bats living in my attic or chimney. What should I do?

Contact a nuisance wildlife control operator.

Information on licensed nuisance wildlife control operators that handle bat exclusion or removal in your county is available by going to the department's website at fw.ky.gov, clicking on the "Wildlife" tab, then selecting "Nuisance Wildlife." A link to find a nuisance wildlife control operator in your area is available on that webpage.

There's a bat flying or roosting inside my house. What should I do?

If the room has direct access to the outside (window or exterior door), close all openings to other portions of the house, open the window/door, and wait for the bat to leave.

If the bat is unable to leave on its own, call a nuisance wildlife control operator for assistance.

I see a bat roosting outside in the daylight. What should I do?

It is actually quite common for bats to roost outside. If you observe a bat roosting, it's probably just fine.

Leave it alone and keep kids and pets and others away from it.

If I think a bat is hurt, should I try to save it?

Rehabilitation of bats should, under normal circumstances, only be conducted by trained professionals. You should never try to care for the bat yourself due to health risks to the bat and yourself.

Given the current lack of knowledge regarding the potential spread of this virus from people to native bats, wildlife rehabilitators are discouraged from accepting bats at this time.

Note: To learn more about the state's COVID-19 response, visit the official source for information about COVID-19, kycovid19.ky.gov. Also, please be sure to check our COVID-19 webpage – fw.ky.gov/covid19 – for the latest information related to Kentucky Fish and Wildlife. If you have any specific questions or concerns related to Kentucky's fish or wildlife, please contact us at 1-800-858-1549.