



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA  
Department of Wildlife Resources

Matthew J. Strickler  
Secretary of Natural Resources

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Executive Director

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Dear Wildlife Rehabilitation Permittee:

The Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) recognizes the important services you provide to the public and your role in helping manage wildlife for the benefit of all Virginia citizens, 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). The DWR continues to support your work by developing new 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 transported from the place of origin to a rehabilitation facility.

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. Lastly, the conditions describing the release of high-risk rabies vector species have been updated. Taking into account this new disease landscape, new permit conditions have been developed for a variety of species and are described below. These new permit conditions are effective immediately and will remain in effect until further notice.

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.

**Oral Rabies Vaccine Zone (ORVZ)** includes Buchanan, Dickenson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Tazewell, Washington, and Wise 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 (excluding big brown bats) – COVID-19 risk reduction**

1. PPE is required when directly handling bats and when entering an active roost or working in a room that houses captive bats.
2. Bats must be tested for COVID-19 prior to release (please see current guidelines for SARS-CoV-2 testing at <https://dwr.virginia.gov/wildlife/diseases/information-for-dwr-permittees/>).
3. Standard COVID response protocol shall be followed.

**All other mammal species (including big brown bats) – COVID-19 risk reduction**

1. PPE is required when directly handling mammals and when working in the same room as any species of mammal (see below for additional guidance for white-tailed deer).
2. Standard COVID response protocol shall be followed.

Additional permit conditions for specific mammal species are listed below.

**White-tailed deer - COVID-19 risk reduction**

1. A K95 or N95 (preferably fitted) is required when directly handling fawns or when in the same room as fawns.
2. Fawns shall be moved to an outdoor pen as soon as possible. If housed indoors, air flow and ventilation shall be optimized.
3. Direct handling and contact with fawns shall be limited to no more than three people for the last 14 days prior to release (i.e., the same three people will feed, clean, administer treatments, etc. to the fawn for at least two weeks prior to release).
4. Fawns shall not be released for at least 14 days after the last fawn has joined the captive group. If a fawn is admitted to a facility within 14 days of the expected release date of the group, it must be quarantined (i.e., kept separate from the group) and cannot be released until at least 14 days after arrival.
5. Fawns shall not be released for at least 14 days after any rehabilitation staff or volunteer tests positive for COVID-19.

**Red and grey foxes originating from the E. multi zone – *E. multilocularis* risk reduction**

1. Disinfection of equipment (box traps, carriers, etc.) is required.
2. Appropriate disposal of carcasses is required.
  - a. **Fox pups originating from the E. multi zone**
    - i. **Collected from the wild before June 1:** No restrictions.\*
    - ii. **Collected from the wild after June 1:**
      1. **If received by permitted rehabilitator in E. multi zone:** No restrictions.\*
      2. **If received by permitted rehabilitator located in any other county or city:**
        - a. **Non-weaned pups:** Rehabilitators must obtain permission from DWR to possess non-weaned fox pups originating from the E. multi zone after June 1. Rehabbers shall be prepared to submit photos to Chelsey Faller at [chelsey.faller@dwr.virginia.gov](mailto:chelsey.faller@dwr.virginia.gov) (540-315-6145) to prove that the pups are not yet weaned.
        - b. **Weaned pups:** Pups shall be immediately euthanized, immediately released in the same county from which they were acquired, or transferred to a rehabilitator located in the E. multi zone.

\* Fox pups originating from outside the *E. multi zone* received by rehabilitators located in the E. multi zone shall be released in the county of rehabilitation.

**b. Adult foxes**

- i. **If received by permitted rehabilitators located in E. multi zone:** All foxes, regardless of location of origin, must be released in the county in which they were rehabilitated.
- ii. **If received by permitted rehabilitators located in any other county or city:** Adult foxes shall be immediately euthanized, immediately released in the same county from which they were acquired, or immediately transferred to a rehabilitator located in E. multi zone.

**Cottontails – RHDV2 risk reduction**

1. The rehabilitation of cottontails on the same property or premises where domestic rabbits are housed shall be prohibited.
2. Direct and indirect contact between rehabilitated cottontails and free-ranging cottontails shall be eliminated.
3. Staff/volunteers that have direct contact with rehabilitation cottontails shall avoid contact with domestic rabbits without first changing clothes and showering between interactions (and vice versa).
4. Disinfection of equipment (carriers, etc.) is required.
5. Appropriate disposal of carcasses is required. Waste, hay, etc. shall also be double-bagged and discarded in a landfill.

**High-risk rabies vector species – Rabies risk reduction**

1. Animals shall be released in the area in which they were found or in the county in which they were rehabilitated. Exception: No permitted wildlife rehabilitation facilities located in the ORVZ are authorized to rehabilitate highest-risk rabies vector species (except bats) due to the Oral Rabies Vaccination program conducted by USDA-APHIS. Highest-risk rabies vector species originating from the ORVZ but rehabilitated in a county outside the ORVZ must be released in the county of rehabilitation.

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

- Minimize direct handling of mammals as much as possible and limit the number of people providing care.
- Wash your hands often and thoroughly for at least 30 seconds using soap/water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer while working with or around wildlife.
- Touch the mask/N95 only when wearing clean gloves. Discard the mask immediately if it becomes soiled.
- Wear disposable gloves or decontaminate gloves after use.
  - Gloves can be decontaminated using an alcohol-based solution containing at least 70% ethanol, bleach solution, or EPA-registered disinfectant.

The DWR encourages all permitted rehabilitators and volunteers 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, the vaccination status of staff and volunteers 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. Up-to-date information on permit conditions 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. Please continue to keep yourself and your families' safe while exercising measures to protect humans and wildlife during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,



Ryan J. Brown  
Executive Director