



Overview

Wildlife, or “zoonotic” diseases, are caused by the transfer of pathogens between animals and humans. Over 75% of emerging diseases originate in wildlife. Their spread is exacerbated by deforestation, wildlife exploitation, development, and poor waste management, all of which increase wild animal-human proximity and the chance of wildlife disease spillover. The costs of wildlife diseases to public health are enormous, and tend to fall disproportionately on BIPOC communities, stemming from poor healthcare access and structural discrimination. If states do not take action, wildlife diseases will continue to spread, and future pandemics could be even harder to control. Experts identify the [One Health](#) approach – a recognition of the interconnections between the health of people, animals, and our shared environment – as one of the best ways to respond to the threat of zoonotic disease.

Policy Options

- **Oregon HB 4128 (enacted 2022):** Prohibits sale of live animals for human consumption except for “farm use.” Directs Fish and Wildlife Commission to update restrictions for the import/trade of wildlife that pose an elevated risk.
- **Missouri HB 3509 (enacted 2023):** Appropriates \$78 million for the design and construction of a multi-agency One Health Laboratory (see p. 27 Section 20.610).
- **Texas S.B. 811 (enacted 2023):** Requires the Texas Animal Health Commission, upon a wildlife disease outbreak, to notify each adjacent landowner and the Parks and Wildlife Department on the nature and location of the outbreak.
- **Washington SB 5693 (enacted 2022):** Appropriates \$1 million for the creation of an environmental forensics research center to help disrupt and dismantle illegal international wildlife and plant trade (see p. 703 #47).
- **New York S.B. 4859 / A. 5682 (passed but vetoed 2023):** Requires state contractors to not contribute to tropical forest degradation or deforestation; establishes a supply chain transparency program to assist minority- and women-owned businesses.
- **Arkansas SB 476 (enacted 2023):** Creates the Rural Veterinary Student Scholarship Program and requires that all graduates complete advanced training in public health, livestock biosecurity, foreign animal disease diagnosis, regulatory veterinary medicine, and zoonotic disease.

KEY POINTS

- Approximately [one-quarter of human deaths](#) are caused by infectious diseases and nearly 60% of infectious diseases originate in wildlife.
- [Examples of wildlife diseases include:](#) COVID-19, HIV, Malaria, Ebola, SARS, bird flu, swine flu, West Nile and Lyme disease, and almost all started with wildlife exploitation through trade or hunting.
- Nationally, Black, Hispanic and Native Americans suffer from [disproportionate COVID-19 case and death rates](#) while often living in low income areas that [enable production of disease carrying mosquitoes](#).
- Wet markets bring together wildlife, domestic animals and humans that might never be in close contact otherwise - [this allows disease to spill over](#) to humans and between species.

Other Resources

- **U.S. National Library of Medicine** [NIH report](#) on additional measures to limit wildlife diseases beyond the banning of wildlife markets.
- **American College of Environmental Lawyers’** [measures](#) that states can adopt to help prevent or mitigate the next pandemic.
- **Biodiversity** plays a key role in reducing incidences of [Lyme disease](#) and [West Nile virus](#)
- **Scientific American:** Wildlife diseases compound crises in minority communities such as the [Navajo People](#).
- **NCEL’s** webpage on [wildlife trafficking](#) provides an overview of how states can limit the importation and trade of exotic animals, which also contributes to the spread of zoonotic disease.
- **Center for Disease Control’s** [approach](#) to One Health and inter-agency coordination, including during the COVID-19 pandemic.

