

# Correspondence

## Great-ape health in human pandemics

SARS-CoV-2, the coronavirus responsible for the current COVID-19 pandemic, is also a threat to our closest living relatives, the great apes. As leading experts in the conservation and health of these animals, we urge governments, conservation practitioners, researchers, tourism professionals and funding agencies to reduce the risk of introducing the virus into these endangered apes. They can do this by applying the International Union for Conservation of Nature's best-practice guidelines for health monitoring and disease control in great-ape populations (see [go.nature.com/3b1bq9k](https://go.nature.com/3b1bq9k)).

It is unknown whether the morbidity and mortality associated with SARS-CoV-2 in humans are similar in apes. However, transmission of even mild human pathogens to apes can lead to moderate-to-severe outcomes (L. V. Patrono *et al. Emerg. Microbes Infect.* 7, 1–4; 2018).

In the present situation, we recommend that great-ape tourism be suspended and field research reduced, subject to risk assessments to maximize conservation outcomes (for example, poaching could rise with fewer people in the vicinity). Such efforts should include ways to offset loss of earnings from tourism, while taking care not to interfere with work to save human lives.

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\*On behalf of the Great Ape Health Consortium ( see [go.nature.com/2wdrzpk](https://go.nature.com/2wdrzpk)).

## Care for lab animals in COVID-19 crisis

All US research programmes funded by Public Health Solutions in New York City or accredited by the non-profit organization AAALAC International are required to have a care plan in place for laboratory animals in the event of a disaster. The COVID-19 pandemic could constitute such a disaster if it creates severe shortages in staffing and in supply chains.

As someone who helped labs to retool after Hurricane Sandy hit in 2012, I advise research groups to build up substantial reserves of crucial animal-care and laboratory supplies. These include personal protective equipment as well as food, water and bedding for the animals. Individually ventilated cages can be brought in to cut back on cage-cleaning requirements. Back-up for services such as animal care and health checks will be necessary.

And if there are no longer enough staff members to provide basic animal care, depopulation might be the only option. In that case, researchers should follow the American Veterinary Medical Association guidelines (see [go.nature.com/2vky3nn](https://go.nature.com/2vky3nn)). Important cell lines and tissues should be cryopreserved.

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## Wildlife trade: ban orientalism

Western voices claim that China needs “to discredit engrained cultural beliefs” to make the country's ban on wildlife trade workable (see J. Ribeiro *et al. Nature* 578, 217; 2020). This stereotyped perception of Chinese society disregards the country's huge support for the ban, thanks to efforts by conservationists and the government, as well as evidence that traditional wild-meat consumption is in decline – particularly in the young and in large urban areas (see, for example, [go.nature.com/3d8za5i](https://go.nature.com/3d8za5i) and [go.nature.com/33qglz](https://go.nature.com/33qglz); in Chinese).

Ribeiro and colleagues' perception of archaic beliefs that are grounded in agricultural–pastoral societies is misplaced. Efficient policies aiming to decrease wildlife trade should involve law enforcement and reduction of both supply and demand. Comments on policies and cultural beliefs, particularly when these are made from high-income to low- or middle-income countries, should be more respectful of cultural diversity. A ban on orientalism is long overdue.

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## Science councils for US Congress

The US President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology is composed of accomplished individuals from academia and industry who volunteer to help the president. Cabinet secretaries and other federal officials who need outside expertise also use advisory committees. Congress, however, has no such formal advisory bodies.

Instead, lawmakers and their staff have to feverishly track down experts, hoping they will be available, understand policy matters, and can communicate effectively to policymakers – a tall order. As a result, bills are not always as scientifically informed as they could be. That's why the Federation of American Scientists, of which I am president, is working with interested lawmakers on a pilot programme to help them to establish their own science and technology advisory councils.

These councils will comprise scientists from universities and research institutions in the lawmaker's own state or district. Away from the hectic pace of Washington DC, members can regularly meet with their advisers when at home, develop sustained relationships and work together to address pressing policy issues. These experts can advise on local issues, such as the impact of climate change on flood plains and the preparedness of health-care facilities for virus outbreaks.

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**Supplementary information to:**  
**Great-ape health in human pandemics** List of co-signatories to a Correspondence published  
in *Nature* 579, 497 (2020)

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-00859-y>

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