

MEMORANDUM

Date: March 10, 2020

To: Chimpanzee Range Country Local Community Leaders, Government Partners, & NGOs

From: The Jane Goodall Institute USA

Re: Chimpanzees and the 2019 Novel Coronavirus Pandemic

The purpose of this Memorandum is to inform our partners who are charged with the conservation of chimpanzees (*Pan troglodytes*) of the potential risk posed by the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (2019-nCoV) pandemic. Herein JGI states our recommendations for protection of chimpanzees from this new pathogen.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The World Health Organization China office was first alerted to several cases of pneumonia in people in the city of Wuhan, Hubei Province, China on December 31, 2019. A novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) was confirmed as the cause on January 7, 2020. The governments of Thailand and Japan soon reported imported human cases of 2019-nCoV in mid-January, indicating that the virus was spreading quickly. On January 30, 2020, the World Health Organization declared a global public health emergency. As of February 5, 2020, there have been 24,554 confirmed human cases (24,363 in China; 191 outside China), and 492 human fatalities (491 in China, 1 outside China)¹. As of February 5, 2020, no laboratory confirmed cases have been documented on the African Continent, but the risk of introduction to the continent is high. Up-to-date information on the outbreak can be found here:

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>.

In people, 2019-nCoV infections present as do other respiratory illnesses: nasal discharge, sore throat, cough, and fever. Symptoms can be mild to severe; deaths are due to severe pneumonia. Treatment is in the form of supportive care; there is no vaccine. The case-fatality rate, or the proportion of confirmed 2019-nCoV patients who die due to infection, is currently approximately 2%. The 2019-nCoV is spread via contact with aerosolized droplets emitted by an infected person who sneezes or coughs. The virus is thought to be able to survive in the environment for a few hours; simple disinfectants (e.g. alcohol or diluted household bleach) will kill the virus. At present, it is unknown where and how this virus emerged, but an animal source is suspected (early cases were individuals who had contact with domestic and wild animals at a live animal market): this is an active area of inquiry.

CHIMPANZEE HEALTH & WELFARE

Across their range, many chimpanzee populations are habituated to the presence of people at close range whether because they live in nearby communities with shared habitat, because of conservation programs, tourism, or research. Many chimpanzees may be in daily contact with

¹ See World Health Organization Situation Report 16, February 5, 2020

people (park personnel, researchers, veterinarians) and those who are, are also uniquely at risk for contracting human pathogens.

It is unknown if great apes are susceptible to 2019-nCoV. However, great apes, especially chimpanzees, are known to be susceptible to infection with human respiratory pathogens. To date, we do not know if 2019-nCoV infections have occurred in any chimpanzees or other great apes for that matter. However, while there are confirmed cases of the virus on the African continent ***at this point, it is safest to assume that all four subspecies of chimpanzee are susceptible to 2019-nCoV.***

TO MINIMIZE THE POTENTIAL FOR 2019 NOVEL CORONAVIRUS TRANSMISSION TO EASTERN GORILLAS:

There is no more effective measure for prevention of the introduction of 2019 n-CoV to chimpanzees or other great apes than to restrict direct and indirect contact between the chimpanzees and anyone at risk of infection or who is clinically ill. ***The Jane Goodall Institute recommends strict enforcement of standard IUCN rules for exposure to chimpanzees, most especially:***

- ***Maintenance of a distance of at least 10 meters (32.8 feet) from chimpanzees at all times; and***
- ***Assurance that no employee or tourist who is clinically ill is allowed to visit chimpanzees in any capacity.***

Further, JGI recommends the [IUCN Best Practice Guidelines for Health Monitoring and Disease Control in Great Ape Populations](#), which identify the following considerations (among several) for disease prevention that are particularly relevant to the current 2019-nCoV pandemic:

- Ensure that all individuals coming into close proximity of chimpanzees are wearing clean clothing and disinfected footwear;
- Provide hand-washing facilities and supplies;
- Require that a surgical face mask be worn by anyone coming within 10 meters of chimpanzees;
- Reinforce instructions that people who need to sneeze or cough should cover their mouths and noses with the crook of their elbows rather than their hands;
- Provide hand sanitizer
- Impose a minimum 7-day quarantine for all people arriving from outside the country who will come into more frequent and longer-term close proximity with chimpanzees (e.g. veterinarians, researchers, journalists)

In closing – The purpose of this Memorandum from JGI is to confirm for our partners that the current 2019-nCoV pandemic should be considered a potential threat to the health of chimpanzees. Strict adherence to best practices for disease prevention is the single most important and effective barrier to transmission of 2019-nCoV to chimpanzees. ***JGI welcomes the opportunity to engage all government and non-governmental organization partners in implementing measures to protect chimpanzees from 2019-nCoV and other infectious pathogens of human origin.***

End of Memorandum