

Submission Date: 5/19/2005

Committee: Infectious Disease
05-ID-10

Title: Addressing Public Health Threats Associated with the Exotic Pet Trade

Statement of the Problem:

Despite a recent surge of zoonotic diseases introduced into the United States and the escalating impact of zoonoses globally, there has not been a coordinated and focused national effort to comprehensively address the public health threats associated with the largely unrestricted trade in exotic animals. In 2003, stimulated by the recent importation of African rodents infected with monkeypox into the United States, a NASPHV/ CSTE position statement 03-ID-13 titled "Developing Importation and Exportation Restrictions on Exotic and Native Wildlife with Potential Adverse Impact on Public Health" described the problem and recommended that a working group consisting of representatives from the CDC; U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), FDA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and NASPHV and CSTE be formed with goals of rapidly developing recommendations for effectively restricting the importation and exportation of exotic or native live or dead wildlife having a potential impact on public health, except for legitimate scientific use, exhibition in an accredited zoological institution, or captive breeding in programs for conservation or species survival in an accredited institution. While federal agencies expressed support, and the monkeypox outbreak was effectively controlled, a working group dedicated to mitigating the looming zoonotic disease risks associated with the trade in exotic animals was not initiated, and no significant progress has been made. New import regulations have been implemented for six species of African rodents, civet cats and birds from some areas of Asia; however, a vast majority of exotic animal species continue to enter the United States without restriction. State and local regulations vary widely regarding the private ownership of exotic and native wildlife; however, many states do not have regulations which effectively prevent and control the public health threats associated with exotic animals. Federal regulations concerning exotic animals involve many agencies and are not comprehensive or coordinated to effectively control and prevent public health risks posed by the trade in exotic wildlife. The myriad of agency jurisdictions and authorities needs to be reviewed, aligned and strengthened to more effectively protect public and animal health from zoonotic diseases transmitted by exotic animals.

Statement of the desired action(s) to be taken: NASPHV and CSTE recommend that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lead and support an initiative to coordinate federal agencies including USDA, USFWS, USGS, FDA with representation from NASPHV and CSTE, state wildlife and animal health officials, and other stakeholders such as the American Zoo and Aquarium Association in a working group to formulate effective policy and develop and implement a comprehensive approach to address the public health threats associated with the international and national trade in exotic animals.

Public Health Impact:

New policy and a nationally coordinated plan will assist in protecting public health, animal health and native wildlife from diseases introduced by exotic animals, most of which do not have effective vaccines or treatments.

Coordination: USDA, FDA, USFWS, state agencies and organizations, US Human Society, US Animal Health Association and other professional organizations will be important collaborators. CDC should lead this effort.

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