



Protect Public Health Through Comprehensive Retail Pet Sales Bans

Millions of wild animals are bred in captivity or imported into the US each year for the pet trade. This creates serious public health risks by facilitating the spread of zoonotic diseases. Zoonotic diseases are among the most dangerous on the planet, including HIV Aids, Ebola hemorrhagic fever, and SARS. Spillover events, where zoonotic pathogens jump from animals to humans, are the primary source of emerging infectious diseases.¹ **Retail pet sales bans are an important tool for protecting public health and preventing future pandemics.**

Poor Sanitation and Intensive Confinement Increase Disease Risks

In the US, animals in the pet industry are intensively bred in large commercial facilities, creating ideal conditions for disease transmission and the emergence of more virulent pathogens. Animals are exposed to many stressors, including restricted movement, artificial lighting, loud sounds, restricted feeding, and abnormal social groupings.² These stresses weaken animals' immune systems, making them more vulnerable to contracting and transmitting disease.³

Disease Outbreaks in the Pet Trade Are Common

Disease outbreaks in the pet trade are frequent. Parrots, lovebirds, and finches imported from Pakistan to Italy brought Exotic Newcastle Disease, a highly infectious and deadly avian virus.⁴ Imported birds have been linked to psittacosis outbreaks and to the introduction of West Nile Virus.⁵ A shipment of rodents from Ghana to the US led to a monkeypox outbreak after the disease was transmitted from the rodents to prairie dogs and then to humans.⁶ An outbreak of tularemia in prairie dogs at a pet distributor in Texas spilled over to humans. During the outbreak, the distributor transported more than 1,000 exposed animals to 10 states and seven countries.⁷

Disease outbreaks also harm animals living in the wild. Chytridiomycosis, a disease responsible for the extinction

of 30% of amphibian species globally, spread through trade in African clawed frogs.⁸

Wildlife Laws Don't Protect Against Diseases

Wildlife trade regulations are aimed at conservation, not at preventing disease.⁹ Further, US health laws are designed to protect against established diseases, not to prevent the emergence of new ones. For example, domestic and international restrictions on monkeypox in imported rodents were implemented only after the outbreak involving rodents from Ghana.

Disease Transmission in the Home

Keeping wild animals as "pets" creates multiple pathways for zoonotic spillover, including scratches, bites, and touching animal waste and food. Interactions with animals in pet stores have resulted in serious diseases such as psittacosis (parrots), tularemia (rabbits), rat-bite fever (rats), leptospirosis (mice), COVID-19 (hamsters), lymphocytic choriomeningitis (hamsters), and Salmonella (reptiles).¹⁰

Reptiles, amphibians, and small mammals are a common source of Salmonella infection in humans. Salmonella is found in the digestive tracts of healthy reptiles and amphibians, but it can cause severe illness or death in humans, especially among pregnant individuals, young children, and the elderly. While Salmonella infection has multiple causes, "[r]eptile-associated Salmonella

infections are more likely to be associated with invasive disease, more commonly lead to hospitalization, and more frequently involve infants than do other Salmonella infections.”¹¹ Bearded dragons, geckos, and small turtles are just a few of the animals sold in chain stores linked to recent Salmonella outbreaks.¹²

Rat bite fever has a mortality rate of up to 13% if untreated.¹³ Multiple children have died after contracting rat bite fever, including a 10-year-old boy who purchased a rat at Petco and a baby who contracted rat bite fever from a rat intended to be used as a “live feeder” for the family’s snake.¹⁴

Precedent

- Washington DC, Cambridge, Beverly and Arlington, MA, Easton, PA, and West Hollywood, CA ban the retail sale of almost all animals.
- Multiple cities ban the retail sale of species other than cats, dogs, and rabbits, such as Boston and New York City (banning the retail sale of guinea pigs) and Ferndale, Michigan (banning the sale of birds, ferrets, frogs, reptiles, rabbits, or rodents).

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