

Pandemic prevention agreement must address wildlife trade

April 4 2023



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A new paper in *The Lancet Planetary Health* by an international team of scientists from the University of Washington, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and other institutions says that any future pandemic prevention agreement must address the wildlife trade for human consumption. The authors warn that to date, pandemic governance has

mostly focused on outbreak surveillance, containment, and response rather than on avoiding and preventing zoonotic spillovers in the first place.

Large urban centers and high-speed transport connecting major cities across the globe, where pathogens can rapidly spread, will make [pandemic](#) strategies that rely solely on surveillance, containment, and response strategies even more ineffective in the future.

Three years have passed since the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic. In the aftermath, political pledges have been made to rectify the issues related to this crisis, ranging from preparedness, response and mitigation to prevention. The World Health Organization launched a process for the negotiation of a pandemic convention, agreement, or other international instrument in late 2021 with a target date of adoption by May 2024.

The authors propose that four goals should be considered in the pandemic agreement being negotiated, to prevent pandemics originating from the [wildlife trade](#) (including markets and other aspects along the [trade](#) chain):

- The risk that the [wildlife](#) trade poses to [human health](#) needs to be better understood.
- It is imperative for each country to conduct an assessment of the risk posed from the wildlife trade.
- Countries need to make pledges to reduce or eliminate such risk, from wildlife trade, or to reduce deforestation and forest degradation.
- Funding commitments need to be made to ensure the three previous goals can be met.

Lead author Dr. Eduardo Gallo-Cajiao, from the University of

Washington, said, "Prevention at the source understood as stopping the spillover of pathogens from wildlife in the first place, rather than just focusing on containing their spread once they have emerged, should be the new paradigm for pandemic prevention."

Said co-author Dr. Susan Lieberman, Vice President for International Policy at the Wildlife Conservation Society, "If we have learned anything from the COVID-19 pandemic, governments must take all necessary actions to prevent the next pandemic of zoonotic origin, before it is too late, by addressing prevention at source—working to combat the risk of pathogen spillovers from live wildlife, particularly in large commercial markets, wildlife farms, and along the entire trade chain. Key to that is a multilateral approach, such as that offered by the current WHO negotiations."

The authors say this is no easy task though, as prevention of pathogen spillovers and disease outbreaks from the wildlife trade involves the governance of multiple areas, including the conservation of biodiversity, [food security](#), international and local trade, and of course, public health. Thus, trade-offs need to be carefully balanced to meet multiple objectives.

The authors say that despite the need to keep political attention on addressing the current pandemic, society cannot afford to miss the opportunity of this crisis to encourage institution building for preventing future pandemics.

Said co-author Christine Franklin, WCS Intergovernmental Policy Officer, "The pandemic agreement under negotiation is a once in a lifetime opportunity to ensure that the strategies needed to prevent pathogen spillovers and disease outbreaks emerging in the first place are prioritized, along with post-spillover interventions aimed to curb human-to-human transmission and measures to prepare for, respond to, and

recover from future pandemics. Pandemic prevention at source must be featured prominently in the WHO pandemic agreement."

More information: Eduardo Gallo-Cajiao et al, Global governance for pandemic prevention and the wildlife trade, *The Lancet Planetary Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/S2542-5196\(23\)00029-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(23)00029-3)

Provided by Wildlife Conservation Society

Citation: Pandemic prevention agreement must address wildlife trade (2023, April 4) retrieved 21 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-04-pandemic-agreement-wildlife.html>

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