

Message to Pet Store Owners, Breeders, Distributors and Veterinarians

Due to recent reports of monkeypox in other parts of the U.S., the Arkansas Department of Health wants to ensure that you are aware of a federal embargo that has a direct impact on your industry.

Issued jointly by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) June 11, the order announces an immediate embargo on the importation of all rodents from Africa. These rodents can potentially spread the monkeypox virus infection to other animal species and to humans.

The joint order also bans within the U.S. any sale, offering for distribution, transport, or release into the environment, of prairie dogs and six specific African rodent species implicated in the current monkeypox outbreak: Tree squirrels, Rope squirrels, Dormice, Gambian Giant Pouched Rats, Brush-tailed porcupines, and Striped mice. The joint order applies to animals that are living or dead.

CDC investigations indicate that Arkansas did not receive any diseased animals and there are no reports of monkeypox in the state at this time. However, given there is the potential for people in our state to be exposed to this disease, it is important that everyone comply with the federal order restricting the transportation, sale or release of prairie dogs or African rodents to reduce the risk of transmitting monkeypox.

If you know of a sick prairie dog or African rodent, or in the event that a sick prairie dog or African rodent dies, please contact Dr. Sharon Williams, Arkansas Public Health Veterinarian, immediately at 501.661.2477 (after hours and weekends, 501.661.2136).

Individuals may transport prairie dogs and the six specified rodents from Africa to veterinarians or animal control officials or other entities based on guidance or instructions issued by federal, state, or local government authorities. Persons should call before transporting sick prairie dogs or African rodents to their veterinarian. All other transports, distributions, or sales within the United States of prairie dogs and the six specified rodents from Africa are prohibited.

Under no circumstances may individuals release prairie dogs or one of the specified rodents from Africa into the wild or any other public or private environment. This prohibition includes the wilderness, as well as any public or private lands, parks, prairies, or sanctuaries. Individuals who are apprehensive about retaining these animals should contact Dr. Williams for information about appropriate disposition.

Human monkeypox is a rare zoonotic viral disease that occurs primarily in the rain forest countries of central and West Africa. An extensive multidisciplinary investigation has identified cases of a fever and rash illness in persons who had direct or close contact with recently purchased ill prairie dogs, according to the CDC.