

We Urge the Trump Administration to Take Immediate Action to Prevent Further Disease Outbreak from Live Animal Markets

By: Congressman Alcee L. Hastings & Lisa Vanderpump

As our nation, and indeed the world, struggles to respond to the pandemic outbreak of the novel coronavirus of 2019 and the resulting COVID-19 disease, it is essential that we examine and address the origins of this highly contagious and dangerous disease. China's lax regulation of illegal slaughterhouses and live animal markets, also known as "wet markets," have been directly connected to the spread of COVID-19 and other diseases. Despite this connection, insufficient efforts have been made to prevent the high risk of animal-to-human spread of disease in these markets.

These "wet markets" are known hot beds of disease and have both global-scale public health and animal welfare implications. Outbreaks of disease put hundreds of thousands, if not millions of human lives, at risk, in addition to the inhumane conditions which animals, such as dogs, cats, and other species, are far too often subjected to prior to their slaughter for human consumption. The Vanderpump Dog Foundation visited these illegal slaughterhouses in their documentary "The Road to Yulin and Beyond" and highlighted the unsanitary and inhumane condition of these "wet markets". Scientific reports and data provide evidence that the virus that causes the disease COVID-19,¹ was transferred to humans from a specific live animal market in Wuhan, the capital city of China's Hubei province. Studies show that the virus is 95 percent genetically similar to a coronavirus in horseshoe bats and 70 percent similar to the SARS-CoV, the virus that causes Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome ("SARS") in humans. The genetic similarities between these three viruses illustrate the ability of viruses found in animals to genetically mutate to allow for transmission to humans when they are in close contact.²

These live animal markets keep a variety of common and endangered species in unsanitary and inhumane conditions where they are purchased and then slaughtered for human consumption in the same contaminated areas. The close proximity of animals to one another and to humans, as well as the on-site butchering, creates a breeding ground for viruses and bacteria to thrive and move from host to host, animal to human. Scientists researching the virus suspect that the coronavirus moved from animals to humans via contact with or the consumption of animals, such as pangolins, from the identified live animal market.³ It is clear that the contaminated and inhumane conditions in which these animals are kept and killed present a danger to the health of humans as proven by the global and devastating spread of COVID-19.

¹ COVID-19: [Co]rona [Vi]rus [D]isease 20[19]. The collection of signs and symptoms that present once infected with the virus. For further information on SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19 naming and differentiation, please refer to the World Health Organization's (WHO) article: "[Naming the coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) and the virus that causes it](#)"

² Singhal, T. A Review of Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19). *Indian J Pediatr* **87**, 281–286 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12098-020-03263-6>.

³ World Health Organization. Q&A on coronaviruses (COVID-19): Can humans become infected with the COVID-19 from an animal source? March 9, 2020; <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>. Singhal, T. A Review of Coronavirus Disease-2019 (COVID-19). *Indian J Pediatr* **87**, 281–286 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12098-020-03263-6>.

“We need to address the root of where this devastating pandemic began and we implore local and federal governments to create change. Any lack of action with regards to addressing the source of this pandemic will present a danger for our future, and the threat that similar diseases will not only reoccur but expand. We continue to think of those across the world that have been gravely affected by COVID-19, and encourage global governments to put thought into action to stop this from happening again. This sadly is a stark reminder of what our Foundation has been fighting for since our inception and the incredible need to shut down slaughterhouses and illegal markets,” said Lisa Vanderpump, Founder of The Vanderpump Dog Foundation. “This is a chance for President Trump to take a stand against these ‘wet markets’ and make it his objective to stop the spread of infectious diseases and save the world from another pandemic.”

As champions of the animal welfare movement both in the United States and across the globe, we are deeply alarmed by both the animal welfare and public health concerns presented by “wet markets,” such as the one which has increasingly been linked to the outbreak of COVID-19 in Wuhan. We have a responsibility to sound the alarm now, in order to prevent the next viral outbreak. The stakes could not be higher! This is why it is crucial that President Trump and his administration begin discussions immediately with President Xi Jinping to put an end to dangerous “wet markets,” before the next pandemic. We need urgent action, not just on animal welfare grounds, but to protect the public health of all nations, including our own.

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