



Illinois
Department of
Agriculture

Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor • Chuck Hartke, Director

Bureau of Animal Welfare

P.O. Box 19281 • Springfield, IL 62795-9281 • 217/782-6657 • TDD 217/524-6858 • Fax 217/524-7702

June 9, 2003

To Pet Shop Operators-State of Illinois:

The Illinois Department of Agriculture is notifying you as a licensee that Governor Rod Blagojevich has signed an Executive Order stating:

The importation, sale or distribution, public display, or any other activity that could result in human contact of prairie dogs or Gambian rats is prohibited in the state of Illinois to the until Illinois Department of Public Health determines that the threat to the public health no longer exists.

Please be advised that any person found to be in violation of this Executive Order will be prosecuted to the fullest extent provided by law.

Illinois state officials have determined the source of the infected prairie dogs to be an exotic pet distributor in Villa Park, Illinois. These prairie dogs were held in close proximity with other animals of numerous species, some of which might be susceptible to infection with orthopox viruses. The following animals were at the Illinois premises: hamsters, gerbils, chinchillas, squirrels, mice, pygmy hedgehogs, jerboas, mole rats, degus, and Brazilian possums. Additionally, the dealer had recently sold wallabies, armadillos, short-tailed opossums, raccoons, sugar gliders, and possibly non-human primates. It is believed that Gambian rats brought into the above premises resulted in the prairie dogs infection and epidemiological investigations into this matter are continuing.

Please be advised that the current investigation shows prairie dogs as the only animals exhibiting clinical signs of monkeypox. Gambian giant pouched rats have previously been associated with transmission of orthopox virus. Clinical signs exhibited in infected prairie dogs have included listlessness, ocular and nasal discharges, loss of hair with or without scabs and pneumonia. Pet Shop Operators should also be alert to the development of illness in other animal species that may have been housed with ill prairie dogs or Gambian rats.

Pet Shop Operators that observe sick rodents, rabbits and such exotic pets as prairie dogs and Gambian rats, should consider the possibility of monkeypox and are advised to use personal protective equipment. If you observe, have knowledge of, or it is reported to you, that an animal is exposed to or is showing signs of monkeypox, you are required to contact the Bureau of Animal Welfare at (217) 782-6657 to obtain further instructions. A toll-free number has been established for calls regarding public health and general questions about monkeypox at 1-866-427-7281.

Sincerely,

Carroll Imig
Bureau Chief
Bureau of Animal Welfare
Illinois Department of Agriculture