

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Division of Fish and Wildlife

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NYSDEC Guidelines for SARS-CoV-2 testing and rehabilitated big brown bat release July 2020

Background

Preliminary results of the National Wildlife Health Center's big brown bat SARS-CoV-2 exposure trial suggest that big brown bats are not susceptible to infection by this new Coronavirus that causes COVID-19 in humans. Eight bats were inoculated nasally and orally, and none developed clinical signs of infection or shed virus in saliva or feces. Although this study is unfinished and has yet to be peer-reviewed and published, we have decided that the preliminary findings are sufficient to consider release of big brown bats currently being held by NYS licensed wildlife rehabilitators under the following conditions:

Testing - overview

Prior to any release of big brown bats, the wildlife rehabilitator and any assistants that have had contact with the bats since January 1, 2020 shall be tested for SARS-CoV-2 antibodies (blood test) and current infection via PCR (nasal swab). If the results are negative for both tests and there were no known COVID-19 symptoms, or exposure to known COVID-19 cases, then all big brown bats in their care will be authorized for immediate release. If either test is positive, or if there are known exposures to COVID-19 cases, then the individual bats shall be tested for SARS-CoV-2 prior to release as outlined below.

Bat testing

Bats requiring testing will be sampled as directed by DEC. Following confirmation of negative test results, DEC will inform the rehabilitator that the big brown bats in their care may be released to the wild in compliance with license conditions.

- The wildlife rehabilitator shall not release any big brown bats to the wild that have not been approved by DEC in writing to be released.
- Bats which test positive for CoV-19 shall not be released to the wild and shall be euthanized.
- Any big brown bats that have been co-mingled with any other bat testing positive shall not be released to the wild.