

HEALTH MONITORING AND ZONNOSES

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The world is changing rapidly. This of course affects the conditions for Norwegian wildlife populations. Increasing trade and travel, as well as increasing human population numbers, in addition to reforestation, urbanisation, fragmentation of habitats, introduction of new species, high wildlife population densities and climate change are all factors that affect the health of wild animals. These large-scale changes are all drivers for the emergence of infectious diseases, and volatility of infectious diseases may be one of the earliest biological expressions of climate instability. Wildlife researchers have to take into account and give consideration to the fact that their handling of wild animals places them in a risk group for the contraction of a wide, and relatively unknown, range of infections. Also, and perhaps most importantly, this unpredictable situation creates a setting where intervention and/or introduction of “new” pathogens to wildlife may increasingly trigger disease or even epizootics among the animals.

Health monitoring should, as with laboratory animal research, be a self-evident part of a field research project. The monitoring should include surveillance and sampling that facilitate 1) detection of possible zoonoses and 2) evaluation of the impact of the intervention on the health of the individual animals and the population in question, in addition to being aimed at disease detection that could interfere with research results.

Field studies that fail to take into account possible effects of animal health status on results, the relationship between intervention and animal health and the possible risk of zoonosis, should be discouraged.