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**Several species receive first dose of COVID vaccinations
at Woodland Park Zoo
- More animals to be vaccinated -**

SEATTLE—To continue keeping its animals healthy and safe, Woodland Park Zoo’s animal care team has administered the first of two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine for its most susceptible animal species including big cats and primates.

Throughout the pandemic, Woodland Park Zoo’s animal health team has maintained close contact with national and international animal care and veterinary networks and prioritized the selection of animals for elevated precautions and vaccination based on scientific information, including reported cases of COVID-19 in gorillas and large felids in other zoos.

Multiple zoos across the country have received and administered the vaccine to its high-risk animals. Woodland Park Zoo has been on a waiting list and just recently received its allotment. “Although the number of human COVID-19 cases has reduced in recent weeks, recent reports show that animals in zoos are still susceptible to the virus,” said Dr. Tim Storms, director of animal health at Woodland Park Zoo. “Keeping our animals safe and healthy remains our top priority so it’s still essential to vaccinate to prevent infections.”

Over the past few weeks, 40 of the zoo’s animals, including gorillas, orangutans, lions, tigers, snow leopards, otters, maned wolves, arctic fox, and a variety of monkeys, received the first of the two-dose vaccination series. More susceptible animals will be vaccinated next month, and all vaccinated animals will receive a second dose three weeks after the first.

The experimental vaccine was formulated and provided by [Zoetis](#), a leading animal health company, and is designed for use in zoo animal species only. Zoetis has donated more than 11,000 doses to 70 zoos, as well as more than a dozen conservatories, sanctuaries and other organizations across 27 states. The vaccine has been administered to many animal species, from mink to non-human primates, including great apes. The vaccine was subject to requisite state and federal permissions before distribution, which meant a waiting period for zoos that requested it.

Through Woodland Park Zoo’s medical behavior training program, its animals are trained in a repertoire of behaviors to voluntarily participate in their own health care including routine exams, vaccinations, blood collections, ultrasound, radiographs and a variety of physical rehabilitation techniques. “Training our animals for these behaviors can dramatically reduce stress and risk by helping them become more comfortable with medical procedures and fostering strong bonds that build trust between our animals and their animal keepers,” said Nancy Hawkes, PhD, director of animal care at Woodland Park Zoo. “By giving our animals choice and control over their experience and following their cues, we develop happier, healthier and safer animal residents.”

In preparation for this COVID-19 vaccination effort, training to allow stress-free injections was emphasized over the last several months. The zoo’s gorillas and orangutans position themselves at the front of their enclosure and press their shoulder muscle against the enclosure mesh panel to receive an injection and a food reward for their cooperation. Large cats have similarly been trained to station and lean against a mesh panel to receive an injection. Smaller animals, such as monkeys and foxes, are trained to shift into a smaller space where they can be hand-injected safely.



It has been a few weeks since the zoo vaccinated its first animals. “All animals that we have vaccinated are doing great—to date we have not seen any adverse effects from the vaccine,” said Storms.

Because COVID-19 is a novel virus and long-term vaccine studies are not yet available, this vaccine remains categorized as experimental until sufficient data is collected. “The vaccine has been safely administered by a number of other zoos, and we feel that the benefits of protecting our susceptible animal species far outweigh the challenges of vaccinating them. We will remain in close contact with Zoetis, the [Association of Zoos & Aquariums](#) and zoo veterinary colleagues throughout this endeavor,” said Storms.

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