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Interim Questions and Answers on Embargo and Prohibition of Certain Rodents and Prairie Dogs

On June 11, 2003, CDC and FDA issued a joint order announcing an immediate embargo on the importation of all rodents from Africa due to the potential that these rodents can spread monkeypox virus infection to other animal species and to humans. The joint order also banned within the United States any sale, offering for distribution, transport, or release into the environment, of prairie dogs and six specific African rodent species implicated in the current monkeypox outbreak.

What animals are subject to the order?

The joint order prohibits the importation of all rodents from Africa. In addition, Prairie dogs and the following rodents from Africa may not be distributed, sold, transported, or released into the environment within the United States: Tree squirrels (*Heliosciurus sp.*); Rope squirrels (*Funisciurus sp.*); Dormice (*Graphiurus sp.*); Gambian Giant Pouched Rats (*Cricetomys sp.*); Brush-tailed porcupines (*Atherurus sp.*), Striped mice (*Hybomys sp.*). The joint order applies to animals that are living or dead.

To what extent does this order apply to the import of these animals?

Until further notice, importation of all rodents from Africa is prohibited. This includes rodents in shipments originating in Africa and rodents in transshipments from Africa through other countries.

To what extent does this order apply to distribution of these animals in the United States?

The joint order bans within the United States any transportation, sale, offering for sale or distribution, including release into the environment, of Prairie dogs and six specified rodents from Africa. This ban includes any sale or offering for sale or distribution that occurs completely within one state.

May I take my animal to the veterinarian or animal control as directed by my state or local health department?

Individuals may transport prairie dogs and the six specified rodents from Africa to veterinarians or animal control officials or other entities pursuant to guidance or instructions issued by Federal, state, or local government authorities. All other transports, distributions, or sales within the United States of prairie dogs and the six specified rodents from Africa are prohibited.

May I release my prairie dog or one of the specified rodents from Africa into the wild?

No, under no circumstances may individuals release prairie dogs or one of the specified rodents from Africa into the wild or any other public or private environment. This prohibition includes the wilderness, as well as any public or private lands, parks, prairies, or sanctuaries. Individuals who are apprehensive about retaining these animals should contact their state animal control office for information regarding appropriate disposition.

May I take my prairie dog or one of the specified rodents from Africa to a pet "swap meet" (pets for sale or exchange)?

No, individuals may not transport, sell, distribute, or offer for sale or distribution, prairie dogs and the six specified rodents from Africa at pet "swap meets."

What is HHS' authority for taking this action?

These actions are based upon provisions in Title 42 United States Code Section 264 (Section 361 of the Public Health Service Act) which authorize HHS to make and enforce regulations necessary to prevent the introduction, transmission, or spread of communicable diseases from foreign countries into the United States, or from one State or possession into any other State or possession. CDC and FDA have implemented this statute through regulations, and those that specifically authorize the joint order can be found at 21 CFR 1240.30, 42 CFR 70.2, and 42 CFR 71.32(b).

How does this action affect the role of state and local health departments?

In order to implement and enforce the joint order, CDC, FDA, and other involved federal agencies will work collaboratively with state and local veterinary, agriculture, and public health authorities. HHS has authority to assist state and local authorities in the prevention and suppression of communicable diseases and to accept state and local assistance in the enforcement of federal communicable disease control regulations. In addition, the joint order does not supercede any action that may be lawfully undertaken by state or local authorities except to the extent that any such state or local action conflicts with the joint order. Some states involved in the outbreak, such as Wisconsin and Illinois, have already taken regulatory action. We expect that other states and local jurisdictions may do likewise.

Who will enforce the provisions of the order?

A number of federal agencies have authorities related to the animals involved. FDA will work with the Department of Agriculture, State and local health authorities, and CDC to make sure that people who trade in prairie dogs and the listed rodent species as well as other people who may own these animals are aware of the ban and follow it. CDC and FDA will work with other appropriate federal agencies, such as the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection of the Department of Homeland Security, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of Interior, who have statutory responsibility for enforcing the importation embargos.

What are the consequences of violating the joint order?

CDC and FDA are most concerned with bringing individuals into compliance with the joint order as a means of preventing the spread of monkeypox virus infection to humans and other animals. However, individuals who violate the joint order may be subject to criminal and/or civil penalties.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) protects people's health and safety by preventing and controlling diseases and injuries; enhances health decisions by providing credible information on critical health issues; and promotes healthy living through strong partnerships with local, national and international organizations.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES