

WHO calls for halt to sale of live wild animals in food markets

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WHO urges end to sale of live animals in markets

Geneva, April 14 (RHC)-- The World Health Organization (WHO) is calling for a halt to the sale of live wild mammals in food markets to prevent the emergence of new diseases. The WHO said on Tuesday that while traditional markets play a central role in providing food and livelihoods for large populations, banning the sale of live wild mammals could protect the health of market workers and shoppers alike.

It said some of the earliest known cases of COVID-19 were linked to a wholesale traditional food market in Wuhan in China, with many of the initial patients stall owners, market employees or regular visitors to the market.

The coronavirus's origins more than a year ago have been the source of intense speculation, much of it centred around the likelihood that it was carried by bats and passed to humans through an intermediary species sold as food or medicine in traditional Chinese wet markets.

The interim guidance was drawn up alongside the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). "The guidance calls on countries to suspend the sale of captured live wild mammals in food markets as an emergency measure," the WHO said.

"Animals, particularly wild animals, are the source of more than 70 percent of all emerging infectious diseases in humans, many of which are caused by novel viruses. Wild mammals, in particular, pose a risk for the emergence of new diseases," it said.

"Traditional markets, where live animals are held, slaughtered and dressed, pose a particular risk for pathogen transmission to workers and customers alike," said the guidance. It also called on governments to close sections of food markets selling live wild mammals unless adequate risk assessments were in place.

To date, there are more than 136 million coronavirus cases, according to data collected by Johns Hopkins University in the United States. More than 2.9 people have died, while 77.8 million have recovered from the virus.

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