

What is the issue?

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the serious threat and impact of infectious diseases to humans and other species. In addition to devastating disease burden and loss of life, many livelihood and economic impacts were felt by protected and conserved areas.

The majority of pathogens infectious to humans are zoonotic, i.e., emerged from or can be transmitted between humans and animals. Biodiversity and protected areas themselves are not an inherent risk for pathogen spill over. Human changes to ecosystems and changes in contact between species create the conditions associated with zoonotic disease risk. Solutions require a One Health approach.

to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people,

To support governments and protected area managers, IUCN has developed Guidelines for Prevention, Detection, Response, and Recovery from Disease Risks in Protected and Conserved Areas. The guidelines provide practical knowledge on ten key disease risk reduction topics consistent with sound design and planning, effective management, and good governance, to help shift from reliance on expensive response toward more proactive prevention and preparedness.

What should be done?

CBD Parties and environment agencies are urged to:

- Ensure conservation authorities are actively involved in their respective national One Health coordination platform;
- Align NBSAPs with National Action Plans for Health Security and sector-relevant strategies to ensure biodiversity and health mainstreaming;
- Consider disease risk in land and sea use plans and concessions, for comprehensive environmental and social impact assessment;
- Build in risk monitoring and mitigation, particularly at interfaces where wildlife-human or wildlife-domestic animal contact occurs that could lead to spillover;
- Conduct disease screening and risk assessment prior to reintroduction or other release of species;
- Develop information reporting and disease investigation protocols with other authorities and stakeholders;
- Ensure the timely movement of emergency diagnostic specimens from wildlife to inform disease investigation and response.

Why is it important?

Disease itself and the economic hardship presented by disease crises increase pressures on ecosystems and species. These undermine conservation investments and important and needed conservation progress.

Monitoring and mitigating these risks requires dedicated attention across sustainable development priorities, including in conservation planning and management efforts.

Protected and conserved areas vary in their design and protection status, some allowing tourism, extractive industries, agriculture and other activities in and around the site. Specific actions can be taken by biodiversity managers to contribution progress.