

For Immediate Release

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**SF Zoo & Gardens Backs New Initiative Aimed at
Ending Zoonotic Disease Threats**

*The “Reduce the Risk” initiative links human and animal health
as key to pandemic prevention*

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. — January 22, 2021 — “Zoonotic” diseases – or diseases transmitted from animal to human -- are a threat to both human and animal and most often occur when non-domesticated or wild animals come in close contact with humans, as was the suspected cause of the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, San Francisco Zoo & Gardens and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) are launching a new initiative, *“Reduce the Risk: A Crisis in Human and Animal Health,”* which aims to combat the greatest source of zoonotic diseases: the wildlife trade.

“AZA members are experts in safely and effectively importing, exporting, and transporting animals, and have expertise in preventative veterinary care, including quarantine, and measures to enhance resiliency to animal disease and pathogens,” said Dan Ashe, President and CEO of AZA. “This expertise can provide critical input into national and global policy conversations around wildlife trade, and inform the public that zoos and aquariums are safe places to visit.”

“We are acutely aware of the risk of transmissible zoonotic diseases and take every precaution here to ensure the health of animals, staff and guests,” said Tanya M. Peterson, CEO and Executive Director of San Francisco Zoological Society (SFZS). “We support this new initiative and are prepared to assist in any way we can, including education and awareness-building to our constituents, as we know all too well how the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect all of us.”

As one of only a few zoological institutions with a dedicated Animal Wellness & Conservation Center, SF Zoological Society is the perfect partner to monitor and stay up-to-date with the latest zoonotic diseases, preventative treatments, and both legal and illegal wildlife trade issues. “We are most fortunate that our local community not only consists of many scientific experts but also is strongly against illegal animal trafficking,” adds Peterson.

“Reduce the Risk” intends to build upon existing legislation to create national and international initiatives. Specifically, the initiative will utilize four strategic pillars:

1. Strengthen national policy on wildlife trade;
2. Advocate for stronger wildlife trade policies at the global level;
3. Increase AZA and SFZS programs and efforts that initiative goal;
4. Educate and mobilize the public to help us reduce the risk of zoonotic diseases.

“As we continue to navigate the devastating human loss and economic impact caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and as we chart a course toward recovery, we must acknowledge the origin of our current and tragic circumstance: the spillover and transmission of a zoonotic disease, quite possibly in a live animal market in Wuhan, China. But even more important than acknowledging this, we must act now to avert another similar event,” continued Ashe. “Unless we learn these lessons and take steps to reduce related risks, the same will be true of the next pandemic and the next.”

Additional information on Reduce the Risk can be found on the AZA website at:

www.aza.org/reduce-the-risk.

About San Francisco Zoo & Gardens

Established in 1929, San Francisco Zoo & Gardens connects people to wildlife, inspires caring for nature and advances conservation action. An urban oasis, the Zoo & Gardens is home to more than 2,000 exotic, endangered and rescued animals representing more than 250 species as well as seven distinct gardens full of native and unusual plants. Located at the edge of the Pacific Ocean where the Great Highway meets Sloat Boulevard. SF Zoo & Gardens is currently closed to the public due to COVID-19. Visit www.sfzoo.org for more information.

About AZA

Founded in 1924, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, animal welfare, education, science, and recreation. AZA is the accrediting body for the top zoos and aquariums in the United States and 12 other countries. Look for the AZA accreditation logo whenever you visit a zoo or aquarium as your assurance that you are supporting a facility dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great experience for you, and a better future for all living things. The AZA is a leader in saving species and your link to helping animals all over the world. To learn more, visit www.aza.org.



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