Dear Colleagues,

Like us, I am sure you are watching the news of Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) and preparing your facility and staff to deal with a very fluid situation. As major cultural attractions, you are on the front lines. How you respond will help shape how the public reacts.

At this time, the CDC and other public health agencies are urging calm, maintaining that the risk in the US remains low, and urging people to go about their daily lives while strictly adhering to basic public health measures. These include regular and thorough hand washing, carefully covering coughs and sneezes, avoid touching your face, and staying home from work or school at the first symptoms of cold or flu.

Currently, no Association of Zoos and Aquarium member facilities outside of Asia are closed, and no closures are currently contemplated. Until the CDC or other public health authorities advise otherwise, we will be telling the public that AZA-accredited facilities are following all public health advisories.

Likewise, the upcoming Joint TAG Meeting and AZA Mid-Year Meeting will go on as scheduled.

Of course, more stringent future protocols, including avoiding crowded settings where local outbreaks of COVID-19 occur, should be followed.

The situation is dynamic. With that in mind, we wanted to provide you with a few updates.

Our Colleagues in Asia
We have reached out to our member facilities in Asia, where outbreaks of the disease are most pronounced – Ocean Park in Hong Kong, SEA Aquarium and Dolphin Island in Singapore, and Everland Zoo and Seoul Zoo in South Korea. As expected, all are implementing their emergency preparedness protocols. Ocean Park has been closed since January, and so far as we can ascertain, it is the only AZA-accredited facility that is currently closed. Their staff are prepared and upbeat and committed to excellent animal care while maintaining health protocols. It’s been a tough year in Hong Kong, so please keep our colleagues at Ocean Park in your thoughts.

The Rest of AZA’s Members
As of March 3, 2020, the World Health Organization reports 88 COVID-19 cases in the US, a total of 120 in North America, 114 in Spain, less than 10 in South America, and one in the Dominican Republic, with none reported yet in The Bahamas or Bermuda. Those numbers will certainly climb as testing expands, and the virus spreads.

AZA members where COVID-19 has been found are working with their local and state health officials to track developments and, right now, based upon their guidance, have decided to remain open to the public.

AZA Joint TAG Meeting and 2020 Mid-Year Meeting in Palm Springs, California
I am sure many of you are wondering about the upcoming Joint TAG Meeting and the Mid-Year Meeting. First and foremost, the health and safety of our community is our top priority. We are continuously reviewing guidance from health officials, and right now, the Joint TAG Meeting and Mid-Year Meeting will go on as scheduled. We will continue to work with our host member, The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens, as well as our hotel and convention center partners, to monitor the situation, as well as developments related to the state of California and the airlines.

Understandably, people are concerned about air travel, and for those of us who travel extensively, we are all familiar with situations where the person sitting next to us is visibly ill. Here is what the CDC says about the risk of contracting COVID-19 during air travel:

“Because of how air circulates and is filtered on airplanes, most viruses and other germs do not spread easily on airplanes. Although the risk of infection on an airplane is low, travelers should try to avoid contact with sick passengers and wash their hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer that contain 60%–95% alcohol.”

Steps You Should Take

• Review your Emergency Response Protocols with your staff.
• Begin to prepare for being closed to the public for multiple days.
• Review your supply chain and any goods that were coming from China, and find alternative sources.
• Review the COVID-19 communications toolkit and formulate your public response to questions about the virus.
• Sign up for updates from the Zoo and Aquarium All Hazards Preparedness, Response and Recovery (ZAHP) Fusion Center.

We are monitoring the situation and will continue to update you as necessary. In the meantime, the AZA staff and I are here to help with any questions or concerns you might have. Please feel free to contact any of us.

Best regards,

Dan Ashe
President and CEO
Association of Zoos and Aquariums