

# COVID 19: URGENT CALL TO PROTECT PEOPLE AND NATURE

## KEY FINDINGS



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New zoonotic diseases are emerging at an alarming rate, driven by humanity's broken relationship with nature.

In recent decades, people have increasingly encroached upon the natural world, resulting in escalating levels of contact between humans, livestock and wildlife. As a result, the frequency and number of new zoonotic diseases, originating in animals and transmitted to people, has risen drastically over the last century. Every year, around three to four new zoonotic diseases are emerging. These new diseases pose a grave threat to human health, causing deadly pandemics including HIV/AIDS, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), and most recently COVID-19.

The increased emergence of zoonotic diseases is linked to two widespread environmental risks:

- **Driven by unsustainable food systems, the large-scale conversion of land for agriculture is increasing interactions between wildlife, livestock and humans.** Land conversion is destroying and fragmenting forests and other natural habitats around the world, resulting in higher levels of contact between wildlife, livestock and humans. This problem is only set to worsen as the challenge of feeding a growing population increases and diets shift.
- **Poor food safety standards, including permitting the trade and consumption of high-risk wildlife species, are increasing human exposure to animal pathogens.** Globally, demand for wild meat is growing, as either a delicacy or a necessity, driving increased sale and consumption, and increasing the potential for exposure to diseases during high-risk sourcing, handling and preparation practices.

**The risk of a new zoonotic disease emerging in the future is higher than ever, with the potential to wreak havoc on health, economies and global security.** The COVID-19 crisis exemplifies the devastating costs of global pandemics. Between December 2019 and May 2020, over 370,000 people died from COVID-19 related causes in more than 200 countries, which is just under three times the number of people killed by armed conflict and terrorism every year. The economic impact has been estimated at between US\$2.4 and US\$8.8 trillion in lost output, which is almost three times the GDP of the UK. Almost half of the world's workforce is at risk of losing their livelihoods, with the social and economic effects disproportionately affecting already marginalized groups, including women and indigenous communities. The drastic shifts driven by COVID-19 are also threatening global food security, with warnings that the number of people at risk of acute hunger could rise from 135 million to 265 million by the end of 2020. Further, COVID-19 may impact global stability, with tensions escalating in volatile areas, and geopolitical rivalries between countries predicted to worsen. Beyond these devastating costs, the same forces driving an increased risk of pandemics are also exacerbating the current planetary emergency of nature loss and climate change, putting the health of current and future generations at risk.

**The COVID-19 crisis demonstrates that systemic changes must be made to address the environmental drivers of pandemics.** To date, attempts to increase the sustainability of our food systems by addressing deforestation and land conversion, as well as to tackle the sale and consumption of high-risk wildlife have made some progress. However, many businesses have failed to meet their commitments and some governments have either not put

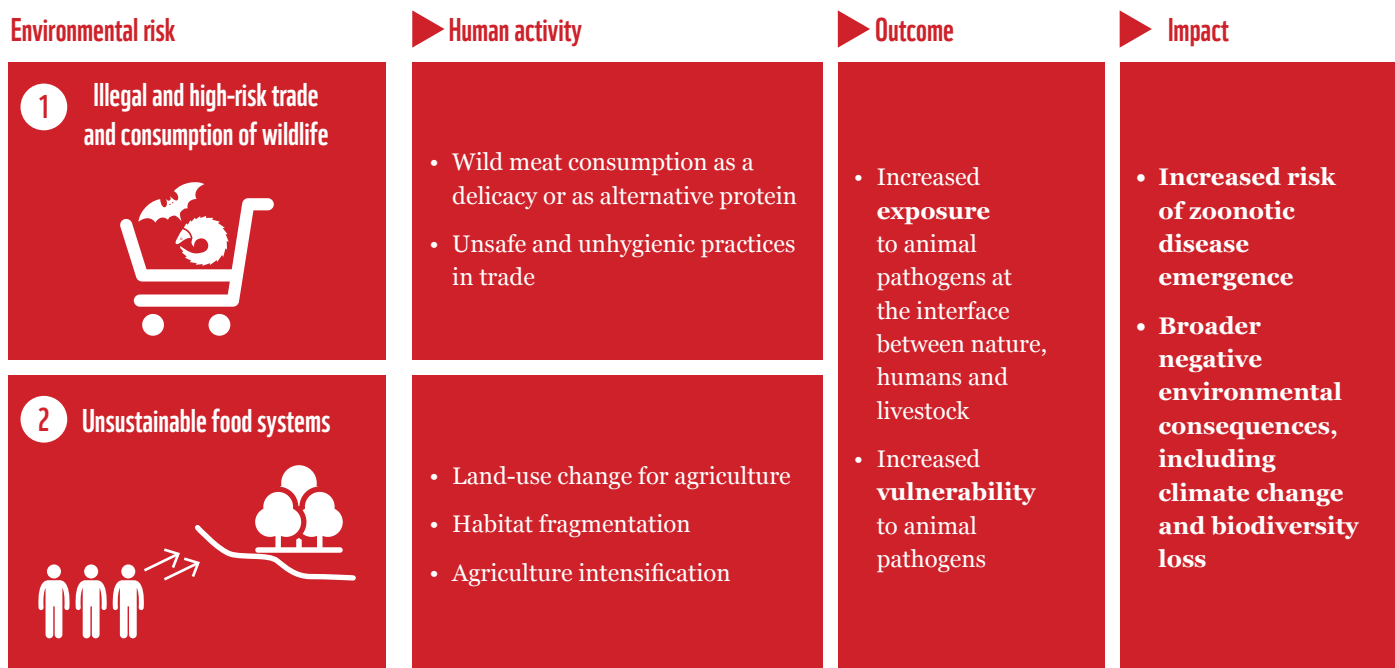
in place, or failed to enforce, legislation. The pandemic has shown that whether tackling environmental issues or health crises, solutions must recognize the deep interconnectedness of different systems. The crisis has demonstrated the power of global responses to drive forward systemic changes, with unprecedented shifts in the way that people behave – from respecting social distancing to, in certain countries, hundreds of thousands of people volunteering to support the crisis response. Consequently, an unparalleled opportunity now exists to work together to address the unsustainable pressures that are being placed on the environment.

**Now is the time for transformative action to protect natural ecosystems in order to reduce the risk of future pandemics and build towards nature positive, carbon neutral, sustainable and just societies.**

A collective response to the crisis must protect nature by:

- Governments commit to a New Deal for Nature & People to deliver credible action that halts and starts to reverse the loss of biodiversity, putting nature on a path to recovery by 2030 for the benefit of all people and the planet
- Stopping illegal, unregulated and high-risk wildlife trade and consumption, and enforcing hygienic and safe practices across markets and restaurants
- Stopping land conversion, deforestation and fragmentation across natural ecosystems, while sustainably feeding a growing global population
- Building a new relationship between people and nature through a sustainable and just economic recovery.

**FIGURE 3: KEY DRIVERS OF NEW ZOOBOTIC DISEASES**



# WWF'S CALL FOR GLOBAL ACTION TO REDUCE THE RISK OF FUTURE PANDEMICS AND HEAL OUR BROKEN RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE

## CALL FOR GLOBAL ACTION

**Humanity's broken relationship with nature comes at a cost.** That cost is revealing itself in terrible ways during the current COVID-19 pandemic: from the mounting loss of life and untold suffering of families to the global economic shock that's destroying jobs and livelihoods. The longer the crisis continues, the greater the threat will be to global peace, security and stability. Yet, there is a real opportunity in the midst of this tragedy to heal our relationship with nature and mitigate the risk of future pandemics.

**New zoonotic diseases are emerging at an alarming rate.** The COVID-19 health crisis reconfirms how people and nature are interlinked, and how our negative impact on the natural world increases the risk of future pandemics. As high-risk wildlife continues to be exploited and the natural world encroached upon, the risk is growing. In our increasingly

globalized world, the probability is higher than ever that a new disease becomes a global pandemic, with serious consequences for our health, economies and ecosystems.

**This is a pivotal moment to build a safer future for people and the planet.** *COVID-19: Urgent Call to Protect People and Nature* shows that the key drivers for the emergence of zoonotic diseases are land-use change, expansion and the intensification of agriculture and animal production, and the consumption of high-risk wildlife. WWF urges governments, companies and individuals to tackle these key drivers and so create a healthier world for people and our planet.

**Although we cannot always foresee and prevent these diseases, we can act to heal our relationship with nature and reduce the risk of future pandemics.**

### WWF CALLS ON ALL GOVERNMENTS TO:

- Halt the high-risk wildlife trade and increase enforcement to combat illicit wildlife trade.
- Introduce and enforce legislation and policy actions to eliminate deforestation and conversion from supply chains.
- Commit to and provide adequate finance for the implementation of an ambitious post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.
- Commit to a New Deal for Nature and People, that puts nature on the path of recovery for the benefit of all people and the planet, with three goals:
  - Protect and restore natural habitats
  - Safeguard the diversity of life
  - Halve the footprint of production and consumption.
- Incorporate a One Health approach – linking the health of humans, animals and our shared environment – within decision-making on wildlife and land-use change.
- Design COVID-19 economic recovery packages that ensure a green and just transition and facilitate increased investment in sustainable and resilient business models.

- Support vulnerable communities to protect their food security and livelihoods in sustainable and resilient ways, including the recognition of indigenous peoples' land and water rights.

### WWF CALLS ON ALL COMPANIES AND INDUSTRIES TO:

- Implement and strengthen all voluntary environmental measures during and after the crisis.
- Deliver credible action to decrease the environmental footprint of food supply chains, including promoting sustainable production, ensuring supplier traceability to points of origin, and encouraging consumers to make sustainable dietary choices.
- Support policies and legislation that ensure all production and consumption of agricultural commodities are free from deforestation and conversion of natural ecosystems.
- Incorporate a One Health approach within all business and financing decisions, particularly risks related to threats to global health.
- Develop and implement innovative financial mechanisms and solutions that have positive environmental and social outcomes.

### WWF CALLS ON CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS TO:

- Support vulnerable communities directly affected by the crisis and its environmental drivers, ensuring that they are adequately represented in recovery efforts.
- Work together with governments and industries to develop sustainable solutions that reduce illegal and high-risk wildlife exploitation and transform our food systems.
- Increase accountability of international institutions, governments and industries that fail to take action in the wake of the crisis.

### WWF CALLS ON THE PUBLIC TO:

- Engage with our government representatives to ensure that they commit to a New Deal for Nature and People, take action to protect natural ecosystems, and strengthen their nature and climate commitments.
- Call on industries to demonstrate leadership through decreasing their negative impacts on society and the environment.
- Shift their dietary and consumption habits to make more sustainable choices.



Working to sustain the natural world for the benefit of people and wildlife.

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