

From: Lucy Spelman
To: Benjamin Beck; Clint Fields; Curators; DAH staff; Deborah Flynn; DOP staff; Erin Jewell; Garrick Smith; John Taylor; Lisa Belitz; Marie Galloway; McKinley Hudson; Michael Morgan; NZP vets; Robert Hoage; Sean Royals; Tula Fitzgerald
Date: 8/23/00 11:13AM
Subject: TB in elephants

Hi

As most of you now know, Nancy elephant had evidence of chronic pneumonia that could be due to mycobacteria.

Included this group of organisms are the "atypical" mycobacteria that are not highly infectious but rather opportunistic (e.g., avian TB) and those that are infectious, which includes bovine and human TB.

Until the final results - which will take at least 4 weeks - we need to take several precautions, but we also become educated about what our options will be if Nancy had either bovine or human TB.

Included here is a web site with the most recent recommendations for Elephants with TB (November 1997). Dick Montali was instrumental in drafting these, and we are lucky that we have the world expert on this disease right here (although he is on vacation this week).

Please review this document.

There may be some changes or updates. For those we will have to wait for Dr. Montali when he is back next week.

Essentially, if Nancy had bovine or human TB we will have to decide whether or not to treat our Asian elephants, and possibly even other animals in the building with oral medicines. And we not be able to move animals around for some time, but not necessarily Forever.

Here are my recommendations for immediate actions. I am going away tomorrow, so I recognize that some additions/modifications may be necessary.

Elephant House Staff

1. skin TB tests for all staff with elephant contact (include volunteers)
2. stop behind the scenes tours for now
3. trunk wash cultures on the 3 Asian elephants ASAP (please call DAH for needed supplies)

Vet Staff

1. skin TB tests for all who are not current
2. review treatment options, availability and cost of medicines

Pathology Staff

1. skin TB tests for all who are not current
2. please supply Bob Hoage and company with a general list of zoological parks and circuses and their locations that have recently found (unexpected or expected) TB in elephants. Maybe go back 5 years.
3. Please also supply a list of past cases here at NZP in megavertebrates, and dates.

Public Affairs

1. please use the information provided here on the web site and from Pathology to review "media"

coverage of TB in elephants in general in the last year or so.

2. This does NOT include calling the different institutions and talking about this issue since we do not have a firm diagnosis.
3. It DOES include searching news archives and etc, again so we can see how this topic has been covered in the media. I want for all of us to be "educated" by the past so we can be proactive rather than reactive.
4. You might also want to learn about TB in Kruger Park, a topic that Mitch B knows well. There is also a lot about TB in bison and deer in the US.
5. There is a lot of information here. It would be great if you can sift through it, find a few concise reviews, and draft a summary of your findings to help educate the rest of us, and the media when/if it is appropriate.

Safety/Occupational Health

1. Help coordinate and track staff in need of skin TB tests (I'll come in when I get back)

Plan:

When we have a final diagnosis (4 weeks or more), we will meet as a team and decide the best course of action to ensure public safety first, and animal safety second.

Comments:

Please know that there is no proven case of a person contracting human TB from an elephant. Most of the evidence looks like it goes the other way. Please also know that both bovine and human TB are treatable in elephants as in other animals. The problem is knowing if the treatment is successful. In an elephant, we simply cannot look inside (the lungs especially), and testing for TB in this species is notoriously difficult. They have tested negative by culture in the past, but we know that TB can be "silent".

Essentially, Nancy could have had this infection for 40 years, and it only began to spread as she became otherwise debilitated. Or did the immune suppressing drugs play a role? We'll never know the answer to this question for sure.

I do not foresee that we would call a press release to "announce" this situation unless our decisions affect public viewing of the elephants and other animals in the elephant house. But I intend to be open and informative about it when the topic arises.

Actually, I think the whole story about TB in elephants and why they get it, and the problems of TB in free-ranging wildlife, is fascinating.

here is the web site:

http://www.umesc.usgs.gov/http_data/whip/eleph-tb.html

-Lucy

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