



# MONKEY IMPORTS AS A BIOSECURITY LIABILITY: AN OVERVIEW

**For years** a network of importers, brokers, and contract laboratories has maintained that biomedical progress depends on a continuous supply of primates. This narrative has fueled the expansion of global sourcing operations—many of which are under investigation for wildlife trafficking—extracting monkeys, including endangered species, from countries such as Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Mauritius, and Vietnam and funneling tens of thousands of them into U.S. labs annually under the authorization of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

## Captive-Bred or Wild-Caught?

In practice, the line between “captive-bred” and “wild-caught” is often deliberately blurred. Importers, exporters, and intermediaries exploit weak oversight and opaque supply chains to obscure the true origins of animals. Paperwork claiming a monkey was born in captivity means little—these documents are easy to falsify, and authorities rarely verify them.<sup>1,2,3</sup> The distinction is critical because “purpose-bred” animals are assumed to be healthier, free of pathogens, and more predictable research subjects, whereas wild-caught animals carry higher risks of disease, stress, and mortality—and their capture directly undermines already fragile wild populations. Traffickers often capture entire social groups in the wild, allowing genetically related monkeys to be passed off as “purpose-bred.” As a result, most animals are sourced with limited transparency regarding their origin, disease status, or the conditions under which they were trapped, held, and transported.

## Imported monkeys arrive carrying or acquiring an alarming range of pathogens:

- Tuberculosis (including novel strains)
- Hepatitis viruses
- Melioidosis (*Burkholderia pseudomallei*) —a Tier 1 select agent
- Herpes B, Ebola-Reston, SRV, STLV, SV40
- Measles, MRSA, VRSA, Campylobacter, Salmonella, Yersinia
- Malaria parasites

## Quarantine in Name Only

In response to mounting evidence that pathogens were slipping through, the CDC issued three nonhuman primate policy statements beginning in 2022.<sup>4</sup> But instead of reforming a broken system, the agency produced narrow, largely voluntary guidance that leaves major vulnerabilities untouched.

These policies rely heavily on self-reporting by importers—companies with a financial stake in concealing disease outbreaks. Tuberculosis is the only pathogen for which testing is mandated, and even that depends on outdated and insensitive diagnostics. Screening for other serious pathogens (e.g., malaria, filoviruses, Salmonella) is optional, and results need only be reported if “expected,” creating a strong disincentive to test at all.

The guidance also ignores well-documented risks of latent or stress-reactivated infections, which often evade detection during the brief quarantine period. There are no requirements for post-quarantine monitoring, ongoing surveillance, independent audits, or enforceable penalties. These policy statements offer the illusion of oversight while shifting the burden of surveillance onto the very companies profiting from the trade.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Hansen M, Gill M, Nawangsari V, et al. Conservation of long-tailed macaques: Implications of the updated IUCN status and the COVID-19 pandemic. *Primate Conserv.* 2021;35:1-11.

<sup>2</sup> Garber PA, Estrada A, Shane S, et al. Global wildlife trade and trafficking contribute to the world's nonhuman primate conservation crisis. *Front Conserv Sci.* 2024;5:1400613. doi:10.3389/fcosc.2024.1400613

<sup>3</sup> Gamalo LE, Ilham K, Jones-Engel L, et al. Removal from the wild endangers the once widespread long-tailed macaque. *Am J Primatol.* 2023;e23547. doi:10.1002/ajp.23547

<sup>4</sup> CDC. Nonhuman primates policy statements. Importation. 2024. Accessed July 2, 2025. <https://www.cdc.gov/importation/laws-regulations/nonhuman-primates-policy-statements.html>