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What Does The Public Know About COVID-19 And Animals?
A new Faunalytics Poll shows there is room for education — and backlash

A new poll by research organization Faunalytics shows that the public is relatively uninformed about the origins and implications of the novel coronavirus, or COVID-19. In a poll of 1,000 people, the organization gauged the level of public knowledge on how the virus developed and found that **the vast majority of the public was not aware of the origin of the virus in wet markets**. Without prompting, fewer than 1 in 5 people mentioned wet markets, and even with true/false choices, under a third of people correctly indicated its origin.

Education about how the treatment of animals relates to human disease is clearly needed. **The good news is that a paragraph outlining the link between animal agriculture and the outbreak was seen as convincing and logical by the majority of participants (52% and 57%, respectively).** These results show that a carefully-presented, factual argument can be convincing. At the same time, we need to be careful not to over-extend the argument. **Very few poll respondents (just 15%) said there was a direct link between disease outbreaks like COVID-19 and animal farming.** And a substantial minority of respondents (20-32%) found the paragraph outlining the link to be misleading, annoying, or offensive–even in the absence of an advocacy message like "go veg" or "reduce your meat consumption." Moving from education to advocacy increases the risk of reactance (backfire effects).

"These results show that we have a long way to go on educating the U.S. public," says Faunalytics' Research Director Dr. Jo Anderson. "The science is clear on how the use of animals for food can contribute to public health emergencies like the one the world is currently facing, but most people don't know about it. We--not just advocates or researchers but everyone--need to replace misinformation with solid facts. And the fact is that this outbreak and others before it have been traced back to sick animals who were packed in tightly with one another and sold to humans as food."

On future actions and ways forward, the results were mixed: **Substantial proportions (42 to 43%) of respondents supported restrictions on agriculture and trade to prevent future outbreaks of disease.** Opposition was the strongest (35%) to the idea of banning any type of animal farming that has been linked to a serious human disease outbreak, but **only 27% were opposed to restrictions on animal agriculture to help prevent future pandemics.**

The complete research report, and additional analysis are available at faunalytics.org/covid-19-poll/. You can also view and share a PDF of the report here.

About Faunalytics

Faunalytics is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that collects and conducts essential research on animal-related issues to help animal advocates increase their impact. Faunalytics manages the world's biggest collection of opinion and behavior research on this topic. The free library includes the organization's independent studies as well as research it collects and summarizes from others. Animal Charity Evaluators has rated Faunalytics a standout charity since 2015. Visit faunalytics.org to learn more.

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