



**PET INDUSTRY JOINT  
ADVISORY COUNCIL**

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**NEWS RELEASE**

***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

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## **New PIJAC Committee Helps Protect Pet and Human Health**

Zoonotic disease is nothing to sneeze at. Every year pet owners in the United States contract pathogens and parasites through interaction with their pets. The resulting diseases are collectively referred to as “zoonoses” (*zoo-no-sees*) and most can be transmitted from animals to people, as well as people to animals.

“The Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council—PIJAC—is pleased to announce the formation of its Pet Zoonoses Committee”, said Elwyn Segrest, PIJAC’s President and Florida-based fish farmer/distributor. “The Committee will consist of a team of experts in veterinary medicine, disease and wildlife ecology, and the pet industry. Their work will help build our capacity to prevent zoonotic disease transmission and respond in a timely, effective, and ethical manner if disease outbreaks do occur.”

Rabies, salmonella, and toxoplasmosis are among the most commonly known zoonoses that can be transmitted between pets and pet owners. Rabies is largely under control due to successful dog vaccination programs; salmonella risks can be significantly reduced through education and proper sanitation; and toxoplasmosis, which is primarily a concern for pregnant women and immune-compromised individuals, is not an issue if those at risk avoid contact with cat feces.

Other very rare diseases, such the Monkeypox, are increasingly in the spotlight, however. “Despite the name, the situation in the U.S. had nothing to with monkeys,” said Dr. Jamie K. Reaser, PIJAC’s Senior Science and Policy Advisor, as well as Coordinator of the new Committee. “The disease may have been transmitted from Gambian pouch rats to prairie dogs to a small number of people in the Midwest. The rats which are native to Africa, and the prairie dogs to the Great Plains states, were being housed in one or more pet distribution facilities and intended for sale as non-traditional pets.”

She added, “By following proper quarantine, sanitation, and pest control practices; providing single-species housing; and learning as much as possible about the needs and potential diseases of each species they work with, pet importers, distributors, and retailers can substantially reduce the risk of disease transmission.”

Marshall Meyers, PIJAC’s Executive Vice President and General Counsel, remarked “It is important that people know how to enjoy their pets safely—whether that pet is a dog, cat or hedgehog. It is also critical that our members know that PIJAC can, and will, provide them with credible information on animal disease prevention, to the benefit of their business, the animals, and consumers.”

The Pet Zoonoses Committee will also make an effort to publicly correct misinformation on pet-related zoonoses that is often distributed through the media, scientific journals, government agencies, and other organizations. "I'm amazed at the amount of misinformation and its sources," said Scott Solar, a member of the Pet Zoonoses Committee who owns two retail pet stores. "We were reading an article in the *Journal of Emerging Infectious Diseases* recently that claimed, for example, that bearded dragons are largely imported and are rarely bred in the United States. That's absolutely not true." He added, "And the same federal agency has representatives advising people to clean fish tanks outside to avoid salmonella. That practice wouldn't protect people or the environment. We need to teach people appropriate hygiene instead."

Bill Brant, a member of the PIJAC Board of Directors and large distributor of reptiles and frozen rodents, will chair the Pet Zoonoses Committee. "I'm looking forward to working with such an esteemed group of colleagues. I'm sure this is going to have a major, positive impact on the industry," he said.

Founding members of the PIJAC Pet Zoonoses Committee include:

David Alderton, MS (Cantab)  
William Brant, PIJAC Board, Gourmet Rodent  
Patricia Bright, DVM, ACPVM, The Wildlife Center of Virginia  
Susan Clubb, DVM, Rainforest Clinic for Birds and Exotics  
Keith Davenport, MS, Aquatic Ornamental Trade Association (UK)  
Thomas Edling, DVM, Petco  
Tim Hovanec, PhD, PIJAC Board  
James Jochim, DVM, Lambriar Kennels  
Craig Kuchera, DVM, Hunte Corporation  
David McRuer, DVM, The Wildlife Center of Virginia  
Marshall Meyers, Esq, PIJAC  
Denise Petty, DVM, University of Florida  
Jamie K. Reaser, PhD, PIJAC  
Nick Saint-Erne, DVM, PetSmart  
Jim Seidewand, PIJAC Board, Pet World  
Scott Solar, Amazon Reptiles  
Bruce Taubert, PhD, Department of Arizona Game and Fish (Retired)  
Ernest Vine, DVM, Central Veterinary Associates  
Steve Zerilli, The Pet Company

The Committee will largely distribute information through the PIJAC website ([www.pijac.org](http://www.pijac.org)), Pet Alerts, trade and consumer magazines, and popular press publications. Already, the Committee plans to release an updated reptile salmonella poster and a brochure on the prevention of avian influenza, and will be working on an incident response plan modeled after successful military programs.

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