



HEALTH & LIFESTYLE

How Primates Are Aiding the Fight Against COVID-19 in Louisiana

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A research center in Louisiana is examining COVID-19 through the use of **monkeys**. By studying the monkeys and their tissues, researchers hope to learn more about the disease.

There are 5,000 monkeys at the Tulane National Research Center. The research center is near a small Louisiana town north of New Orleans.

Most of the **primates** are a sort of monkey called rhesus macaques. They are designated for use in scientific research, including experiments for COVID-19.

The research center has high-level, biosafety laboratories that are able to control biological threat agents like anthrax, an infectious bacterium. It was well-positioned to quickly change to COVID-19 research when the coronavirus pandemic hit.

Skip Bohm is a director and chief animal medical officer at the Tulane center. Bohm said the primates' DNA and physiological make-up makes them ideal models for human comparison when studying diseases.

Bohm told Reuters non-human primates are really important to understand the disease and how it affects an organism. They are also important for comparing outcomes like treatments or vaccinations.

Rhesus macaques are the primate most commonly used for scientific research. They make up the majority of the center's colony. They also make up the majority of the 200 adult animals used in its coronavirus experiments over the past year.

The National Academy of Sciences scientific journal published one study by the center in February. The study found older, overweight humans with a more severe COVID-19 infection breathed out more liquid **droplets**. Due to this, they spread the disease more than others.

Chad Roy is one of the writers on the study. He is also the center's director of infectious disease aerobiology. Aerobiology is the study of pollutants or viruses that travel in the air. He said primates were at the center of this study.

In the future, the center plans to study what is called "long COVID." This happens when a patient remains unwell long after first becoming infected. This effects about 10 percent of patients.

The center's director Jay Rapport said, "there are many different **therapeutics** that are coming online that need to be tested, and with the network that we have, we can compare one treatment to another."

He was describing the center's role in organizing the work of the seven United States' primate research centers on COVID-19 research.

Once experiments end, the Tulane center will humanely kill the monkeys for tissue collection. This permits researchers to study COVID-19's effects on the whole body.

Kathy Guillermo work with the laboratory investigations at the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, also known as PETA. PETA is a nonprofit organization that fights to protect animal rights. Guillermo said primates should not be used for testing.

"They wouldn't have to kill them if they didn't use them," she said. "What we're going to learn of value is going to be what we learn from human beings," she added.

I'm Gregory Stachel.

Nathan Frandino reported this story for Reuters. Gregory Stachel adapted it for VOA Learning English. Susan Shand was the editor.

Words in This Story

monkey – *n.* a sort of animal that is closely related to apes and humans and that has a long tail and usually lives in trees

droplet – *n.* a very small drop of liquid

primate – *n.* any member of the group of animals that includes human beings, apes, and monkeys

therapeutics – *n.* a branch of medicine that deals with the ways to treat illnesses
