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DPNR Issues Urgent Health Warning on Handling Wild-Caught and Free-Roaming Animals

The V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources warns that wild meat, including goat, deer, and boars, may carry dangerous bacteria such as E. coli and Salmonella. Residents are urged to handle all wild game legally and with extreme caution.

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The V.I. Department of Planning and Natural Resources, through its Division of Fish & Wildlife, has issued an important warning to the public regarding potential health risks associated with the handling and consumption of wild-caught animals.

Residents are being urged to exercise caution when dealing with wild game and free-roaming domestic animals such as goats, as well as invasive species like white-tailed deer and red-tailed

boas. The advisory comes amid growing concerns about zoonotic diseases—illnesses that can be transmitted from animals to humans—linked to the preparation and consumption of these animals.

“Eating wild meat can increase the risk of diseases that can spread from animals to humans (zoonotic diseases),” the agency emphasized. The red-tailed boa and mongoose, both of which are known predators of rats, pose particular concern. Rats are carriers of dangerous bacteria such as E. coli, Salmonella, and Leptospira, all of which can pose serious health risks to humans.

Recent testing conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention across the Virgin Islands—including St. Croix, St. Thomas, and St. John—confirmed the presence of these harmful bacteria in many wild mammal populations. However, health officials noted that there is currently no evidence of rabies or avian influenza (bird flu) in the territory’s wildlife.

DPNR also highlighted that wild animals may carry microscopic germs that are not detectable by sight, reinforcing the need for proper handling. “Any processing of wild game or fish should be done safely and legally,” the department stated. Individuals interested in managing wildlife are required to obtain permits or certifications through DPNR’s Wildlife Control Operators and Removal Agents programs.

To learn more about wildlife safety protocols or to apply for the necessary permits, residents are encouraged to visit:

<https://dpr.vi.gov/fish-and-wildlife/wildlife-resources>

For direct inquiries, the Division of Fish and Wildlife can be reached at (340) 773-1082 or via email at DFWelectronic@usvi.onmicrosoft.com.