

Belgian zoo hippos test positive for Covid

December 3 2021

Two hippos in a Belgian zoo have tested positive for COVID-19, their keepers announced Friday, stressing that the giant animals do not appear to be in danger.

The infections at Antwerp Zoo are not the first time that zoo animals have tested positive during the pandemic, but most cases are thought to have been in cats and monkeys.

The building housing Hermien and Imani, a mother and daughter aged 41 and 14, has been closed to the public and their keepers have formed an isolated social bubble.

Antwerp Zoo tested its animals last year and found no cases of coronavirus, but veterinarian Francis Vercammen checked the hippos as cases rose again this winter.

"This time they were expelling snot, which I had tested as a precaution to check for bacteria," he said, explaining how he came to send samples to Belgium's national veterinary lab.

"In view of current events, I took the additional decision to test the samples for COVID-19, which gave this surprising result," he said.

"As far as I know, this is the first known [infection](#) in this species. Worldwide, this virus has mainly been reported in great apes and felines."

It is not known how the hippos were exposed to the virus. Their keepers have had no symptoms but are taking additional precautions and will be quarantined if they test positive.

Belgium, in common with much of Europe, is facing a growing wave of COVID-19 infections as winter grips the country, including a so far small number of cases of the new Omicron variant.

On Friday, Prime Minister Alexander de Croo announced a series of measures to tighten sanitary rules, bringing school Christmas holidays forward and asking children aged six and over to wear masks.

Belgium, with a population of 11 million, has recorded an average of more than 17,800 daily infections with COVID-19 over the past seven days, as well as 44 deaths.

Around 800 people with severe forms of the disease are in [intensive care](#) in hospitals across the country, leading to overcrowding and the postponement of treatment for many other conditions.

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