



FUR COMMISSION USA

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Fur Commission USA (FCUSA) Fact Sheet on Coronavirus Cases on US Mink Farms (March 1, 2021)

What is the current prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 on US Mink Farms?

On August 17, 2020, the USDA announced the first confirmed cases of SARS-CoV-2 at mink at farms in Utah. Over the following few months, a total of 16 farms in Utah, Oregon, Wisconsin and Michigan had confirmed positive cases. In each case, illness among the farm workers occurred previous to the animals being infected. There is no evidence that the mink infected the workers.

Farms with positive cases were put under quarantine with no animals and no animal products entering or leaving the farms. All U.S. farms are abiding by the *CDC One Health* protocols, the *USDA Response & Containment Guidelines for Animal Health and Public Health Officials Managing Farmed Mink and other Farmed Mustelids with SARS-CoV-2*, and State Health Department and the National Veterinary Service Lab's recommendations. Additionally, it has long been the practice of US mink breeders to adhere to strict biosecurity protocols, as mink are highly vulnerable to many human and wildlife-borne diseases.

As of March 1, testing by authorities have now detected no live SARS-CoV-2 virus in mink on 13 of those farms, with the remaining 3 in Utah awaiting results from the most recent rounds of testing. Two consecutive rounds of negative tests are required to lift the farm quarantines. Quarantines are now being lifted in Michigan, Wisconsin, Oregon, and on 9 farms in Utah.

How Does This Compare to the Summer Outbreaks in Europe?

Unlike in the US, European farms are highly concentrated and near population centers – many of which have experienced significant COVID outbreaks. Additionally, European farms maintain larger numbers of animals per farm.

In the most extreme reaction, the Danish government called for the culling of all mink in the country. After many of the mink had already been destroyed – perhaps needlessly – the government suspended the directive over the legality of such a move, and in the face of scientific evidence demonstrating a minimal risk to human and animal populations which can be managed effectively on the farm. The Minister of Agriculture was forced to resign over the premature reaction and culling strategy.

The U.S. mink industry is far different and cannot be compared to the Danish mink industry. Denmark produces almost 10 times the mink than in the US, in a land area about 1/3 the size of Wisconsin. Within that small area there are over 5 million people and 1200 mink farms. Compare this to the US which has approximately 120 farms spread out in rural areas across 16 northern states. Even in the largest domestic producing state, Wisconsin, production is spread among 19 farms all of which are isolated in outlying rural areas.

Do US farmed mink populations pose a public health threat?

It has been determined that mink contract the virus from infected humans. There have been no cases where mink are suspected to have passed the virus to humans in the US. No viral mutations have been detected in any U.S. mink. The CDC, the USDA, the National Veterinary Services Laboratory, State Animal Health Organizations and other governmental agencies and state veterinarians, are assuring us that with proper biosecurity protocols at the farm level, there is no threat to humans from mink.

Are COVID infected farms a threat to wildlife?

In December, one mink in Utah and two in Oregon, trapped outside affected farms tested positive for low levels of the virus. Twenty-five animals from nine other species have also been trapped and tested, each with negative results. There is no indication of SARS-CoV-2 or any viral mutations spreading from farmed mink into any other wildlife species.

Is there a mink vaccine available?

Zoetis, the nation's largest producer of animal vaccines, has finished clinical testing and is awaiting USDA approval to produce and distribute a vaccine for mink. We expect to have 2 million doses available by June 1. Another company, Medgene will also be producing a vaccine, expected ready for distribution by July. Vaccines have also been developed in Russia and at the University of Finland. The scientific data being collected on mink is helping with the development of vaccines that will also protect domestic cats and dogs.

Can I contract COVID from a mink coat or pelt?

No. The source of potential SARS-CoV-2 transmission is limited to contact on the farms. Research conducted by Helsinki University states that the virus, needing a live host, is eradicated long before the pelts would reach wholesale markets or consumers.

The FCUSA is the National Trade Association representing the Mink Producers of the United States. We are committed to ensuring the health of our animals and the people who come in contact with them. We continue to work closely with state, local, international and federal government agencies to take all necessary precautions to prevent the spread of the disease, protect our workers and the general population, and to develop a vaccine.

For more information on the current status of the outbreaks in the US, contact;

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