



## FUR COMMISSION USA

POST OFFICE BOX 1532 MEDFORD, OREGON 97501  
TEL 541.595.8568 FAX 541.566.7489  
WWW.FURCOMMISSION.COM

### **Fur Commission USA (FCUSA) Fact Sheet on Coronavirus Cases on US Mink Farms (April 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 and approximately 15k mink died (out of a 2020 US population of almost 3 million animals). The animals that succumbed to the disease, much like those in the human population, were older and compromised (Aleutian's Disease positive.) In each case, farm employees introduced the virus on to the farms.

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 not detected any live SARS-CoV-2 virus in mink on 14 of those farms, with the remaining 2 awaiting results from the most recent round of testing.

#### **Do US farmed mink populations pose a public health threat?**

It has been determined that mink contracted the virus from infected humans. 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. As a precaution, mink farm workers have been prioritized and are being vaccinated across the country.

#### **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. Since then, over 100 animals of various species have been trapped and tested in proximity to mink farms, with no detection of the virus. There are no confirmed or suspected cases indicating that the SARS-CoV-2 virus or related mutations have spread 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 mid-May. Another company, Medgene will also be producing a vaccine, expected ready for distribution by July

1. Vaccines have also been developed in Russia and at the University of Finland. The Zoetis vaccine is already in use at the San Diego Zoo and will be used to protect domestic cats and dogs as well.

### **How Does The US 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 human 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 Oregon. Within that small area there are over 5 million people and 1200 mink farms. Compare this to the US which has approximately 100 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.

### **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, and federal agencies to take all necessary precautions to protect humans and wildlife, and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

For more information on mink farm biosecurity and prevention measures, see;

- (CDC One Health) [People Working on Mink Farms: Prevent the Spread of COVID-19](#)
- (CDC One Health) [Steps to Prevent COVID-19 on Mink Farms](#)
- (USDA) [Response & Containment Guidelines; Farmed Mink and Farmed Mustelids with SARS-CoV-2](#)
- (FCUSA) [Standard Guidelines for the Operation of Mink farms in the United States](#)

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

- Dr. Ryan Scholz DVM, Oregon Department of Agriculture at (503) 580-4986
- Dr. Dean Taylor DVM, Utah Department of Agriculture at (801) 982-2235