

# 8<sup>TH</sup> CALL OIE *AD HOC* GROUP ON COVID-19 AT THE ANIMAL-HUMAN INTERFACE

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## Agenda

1. Update on SARS-CoV-2 'events' in animals
2. Update on animal-human interface related research and animal/wildlife work
3. Update on the work of the AHG on COVID-19 and Safe Trade in Animals and Animal Products
4. AOB

## Meeting notes

### 1. Update on COVID-19 virus 'events' and surveillance in animals

Netherlands: 15 farms have been reported as affected and all but two have been depopulated, the other farms with infected animals are expected to follow. Legislation introduced in the Netherlands requires that SARS-CoV-2 in mink be reported to the Veterinary Authorities and allows for compulsory depopulation of affected mink farms. At the moment, all mink farms in the Netherlands are obliged to submit carcass samples weekly for SARS-CoV-2 testing and have been tested serologically. The workers from the infected mink farms and stray cats in the vicinity of these farms are being tested too. Sero-surveillance on some of the mink farms which were infected earlier shows that 90% of the mink had sero-converted; this demonstrates that mink are highly susceptible and infection spreads very efficiently in the mink farm environment. In the context of surveillance, it is important to note that clinical signs alone are not a good indicator that farms are infected.

Interestingly, the prevalence of COVID-19 in humans is decreasing in the Netherlands, while the number of minks infected with SARS-CoV-2 is increasing. The date for an eventual restocking has not been determined. Cleaning and disinfection of the facilities creates risks for workers because cleaning can generate aerosols.

The Netherlands had committed to stop farming minks for fur in January 2024.

China: Genetic studies on SARS-CoV-2 and other coronaviruses known to circulate in animals has shown low homology between SARS-CoV-2 and other known coronaviruses.

An update on experimental infection studies conducted in pigs, dogs, and poultry was provided. The results were consistent with results previously reported by other countries. Retrospective testing of 8000 samples from multiple animal species do not provide any evidence that SARS-CoV-2 was circulating in livestock or dogs and cats before December 2019.

Latin America and Caribbean: there have been no reports of animals infected with SARS-CoV-2 in Central and South America and Caribbean. In the case of Brazil, although some private veterinary clinics and

laboratories provide testing for pets, this is not encouraged by the federal council of veterinary medicine. Testing capacity for human specimens is overstretched in most countries and official veterinary laboratories of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay are assisting with RT-PCR SARS-CoV-2 testing the Public Health sector

North America: it was highlighted that the USA reported to the OIE on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June a dog exhibiting clinical signs when infected with SARS-CoV-2. The USA will report new species confirmed positive for SARS-CoV-2 at the National Veterinary Services Laboratories on an immediate basis and will update additional cases in species previously reported SARS-CoV-2 positive on weekly/periodic OIE reports. In Canada, only 14 companion animals have been tested for SARS-CoV-2. So far, all results were negative.

Europe: Denmark is testing mink farms for the presence of SARS-CoV-2.

## **2. Update on human-animal interface related research activities and animal/wildlife work**

As mentioned during the previous call, experimental infection and immunization studies with cattle, racoon dogs, hamsters, ferrets, and guinea pigs are ongoing.

The surrogate virus neutralization test mentioned during the 6<sup>th</sup> call has been tested by other laboratories with success. Although the price per test is costly, this method is not species-specific.

## **3. AOB**

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conducted a rapid risk assessment to provide agency partners with information and insights from experts to mitigate the risk of humans transmitting SARS-CoV-2 to bats through activities involving contact with live bats. <https://pubs.er.usgs.gov/publication/ofr20201060>

There was discussion regarding recent COVID-19 outbreak in Beijing that happened on a market. It was mentioned that contamination of surfaces and utensils by an infected human is far more likely than contamination of fish, as it had been mentioned in media sources.

FAO will publish an exposure risk assessment for animals in the coming weeks.