



**MINISTRY OF RURAL
DEVELOPMENT AND FOOD
DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF
VETERINARY SERVICES
DIRECTORATE OF
ANIMAL HEALTH**

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**TO: World Organization for
Animal Health**

12, Rue de Prony

75017 Paris

France

Dear Dr. Monique Eloit,

I herewith would like to update you about recent developments with regard to SARS-Cov-2 infection in mink in northern Greece. Following the first confirmed case, which was reported to you on 16/11/2020, I would like to inform you about 11 further cases of SARS-Cov-2 detection on mink farms. They are located in the Region of Western Macedonia and in particular in the Regional Units of Kozani (5), Kastoria (4) and Grevena (2).

All new positive farms but one were inspected following notification of confirmed human cases in the framework of the repeated weekly surveillance that is conducted by health authorities in all mink farm workers/owners. Animals from these farms have not been showing either clinical signs or increasing mortality till today. Owner of the aforementioned one farm had reported increased animal morbidity/mortality (notification is mandatory) to the veterinary authorities just before he was tested positive for Covid-19. Health situation on this farm has remarkably improved since then (no morbidity, regular mortality rate and feed intake). So far, none of the inspected mink farms where there is no epidemiological link to a confirmed human case has tested positive. At this stage, available information indicates a human-to-animal transmission in all twelve mink farms where the presence of SARS-CoV-2 has been confirmed to date.

The genome sequence analysis of the SARS-CoV-2 viruses detected from eight infected animals of the first positive mink farm (reported on 16/11/2020) clustered all genomes in B (Rambaut et al. Nature, 2020). More specifically, to B.1.1 (five out of eight), B.1.1.72 (two out of eight) and one genome was clustered in B without any specific lineage. Genomes from the two positives for SARS-CoV-2 human samples related to the farm were classified to B.1.1 and B1.1.72 lineages. None of the amino acid mutations (Y453F, deletion of amino acids 69-70, I692V, M1229I), described on the Rapid Risk Assessment of the 12th November 2020 from EU agencies (ECDC, EFSA, EMA) regarding the spike protein, is present in the spike gene of the mink and human SARS-CoV-2 sequenced genomes. In collaboration with the public health authorities,

sequencing of viruses from the latest confirmed positive cases in minks and human cases from the Region of Western Macedonia is ongoing.

At this point, we don't intend to cull other animals. Movement restrictions and strict biosecurity measures, including the mandatory use of PPE, have been imposed not only to the infected mink farms, which have been placed under official surveillance, but also to all fur farms in Greece. Moreover, reporting of increased mink morbidity and mortality to the veterinary authorities is now obligatory at national level. When human vaccines become available, everyone who comes in close contact with mink (farm workers, owners, veterinarians) shall be included in the highest priority group to receive vaccination.

Enhanced safeguard measures and special protocols are also implemented in the establishments where pelting and pelt drying take place during this period of time. Animals from infected farms will be the pelted last, under official surveillance, right after the procedure for all mink originating from non-infected farms is completed. All dried raw skins will remain stored for at least 4 weeks at the highest possible room temperature. The pelting period is expected to be concluded by the end of next week. It is estimated that 350.000 to 400.000 breeding animals will be kept on farms. Possible SARS-CoV-2 circulation in the remaining mink population will continue to be monitored in the following months by repeated clinical and laboratory examinations.

I will keep you informed about further developments and measures taken by the authorities.

On behalf of the Greek Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO), Mr. Thomas Alexandropoulos,

Yours sincerely,

Chrysoula Dile
Animal Health Director and OIE Delegate

This information is transmitted to the OIE in the context of Article 1.1.6 in the Terrestrial Animal Health Code.

Greece believes that based on existing scientific data notification to the OIE of Covid-19 cases in mink should remain in the context of article 1.1.6 rather than article 1.1.4. However, should EU comes to a decision for its members to provisionally notify to the OIE the detection of SARS-CoV-2 infection in mink under article 1.1.4, Greece shall comply with it, pending the outcome of further evidence.