



Ministry of Agriculture,  
Nature and Food Quality

> P.O. Box 20401 2500 EK The Hague The Netherlands

Dr M. Eloit  
Director General  
World Organisation for Animal Health  
12, Rue de Prony 75017  
Paris  
FRANCE

Date 1 September 2020  
Re Update SaRS-CoV-2 in mink in the Netherlands

Dear Director General, dear Dr Eloit,

I herewith would like to update you, based on article 1.1.6.1 of the TAHC of the OIE, about the situation with regard to the SARS-CoV-2 infection in mink in the Netherlands.

Currently 43 infected mink farms in the Netherlands have been infected. Thirty two are located in the province of Noord Brabant, ten in the province of Limburg and one in the province of Gelderland. On sixteen farms the owner noticed clinical signs and reported the suspicion to the competent authority whereas 27 infections were detected through the early warning system (obligation to send in dead animals weekly).

As mentioned before, the Competent Authority and the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of Utrecht University are currently carrying out additional tracing research to elucidate sources of virus introduction. The results so far indicated that a route of infection via feed, vehicles, pets, wildlife, materials used on farms or by air is unlikely. As a result, humans are still likely to remain the main source of spread of the virus between farms.

We have implemented some additional measures to further reduce the probability of virus transmission between mink farms. Employees are not allowed to switch between companies unless a waiting period of 10 days is applied between working on one location and the other one. The early warning will be continued and enforced. The tracing research will be continued.

We have consulted the outbreak management team for zoonoses (OMT-Z) on 24 August to analyse the outbreaks in mink with respect to the risk for public health. The OMT-Z stated that persons in contact with infected mink on farms are at risk of becoming infected with SARS-CoV-2. Over 50% of these persons are seropositive which is higher than the percentage of infected family members in a household. The OMT-Z further noted that the risk to inhabitants in the surrounding of an infected mink farm is currently negligible, as shown by the negative air samples outside the shed and the recent epidemiological data of COVID-19 patients in the regions with the infected mink farms. The sequences of the viruses found on mink farms are not found in the general population in the

**Directorate-General Agro**  
Animal Supply Chain and Animal  
Welfare Department

**Visit address**  
Bezuidenhoutseweg 73  
2594 AC Den Haag  
The Netherlands

**Postal address**  
P.O. Box 20401  
2500 EK Den Haag  
The Netherlands

**Organisation Code**  
00000001858272854000

T +31 (0)70 379 8911  
F +31 (0)70 378 6100  
[www.rijksoverheid.nl/Inv](http://www.rijksoverheid.nl/Inv)

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postal code areas of these farms. The OMT-Z concluded that the risk of infection from mink to the general human population is currently negligible compared to the risk of infection from human-to-human in the population.

The majority of the mink virus sequences fall in 3 clusters which shows that there is a reservoir in the mink population with a still unknown mode of transmission between the farms. Human data that would be valuable to get more insight are scarce due to privacy legislation. The OMT-Z is concerned that the mink sector has not been able to break the infection chain between mink farms with the current measures. Despite the limited risk to public health yet, the OMT-Z concluded that it is necessary to prevent the establishment of a long term reservoir in mink industry. The OMT-Z therefore recommended that mink farming in the Netherlands should be stopped this year, after the period of skinning for fur in November.

The Dutch Government recognises the importance to stop the spread of the virus between the mink farms because the development of the human COVID-19 situation is uncertain, and a virus reservoir that may pose a greater risk to public health next spring should be prevented. The Government has therefore decided to prepare legislation to end mink farming in the Netherlands in March 2021, before the new breeding period.

I will keep you informed about any relevant development.

Yours sincerely,



Dr C.J.M. Bruschke  
Chief Veterinary Officer of the Netherlands