

Information received from the Veterinary Services of Sweden on 06 November 2020

Dear colleagues,

I hope this information finds you well.

Unfortunately, Sweden has confirmed 9 further cases of infection with SARS-CoV-2 in mink at farms in the southeast part of the country, in the County of Blekinge, i.e. in the same area as the first case was detected. In this area, approximately 20 of Sweden's 40 mink farms are situated.

Dead minks from 18 farms in the area were collected and sampled with swabs from the oral cavity and pharynx and analysed with real-time PCR, as part of the ongoing surveillance based on animals found dead at the mink farms.

Movement restrictions and strict biosecurity measures have been imposed to all mink farms in Sweden, and not only for those infected.

We do not intend to cull the animals at this point. The Swedish mink population is small, approximately 600000 animals, of which around 80 % are already planned to be killed for fur production within the nearest weeks. Based on this, a decision of culling will have limited effect and not speed up the process of reducing the number of susceptible animals. Work environment specialists will work out special procedures for collecting the pelts in a safe way.

The source of infection to these new farms has not been determined yet, but the authorities are investigating eventual human cases of Covid-19 being in close contact with the mink. Notably, the owner of the first farm and his father were tested positive for Covid-19.

The genome sequence analysis of the SARS-CoV-2 viruses detected from mink and humans in close contact with the infected animals at the index farm clustered together and belonged to the Lineage B1.1.39. None of the amino acid mutations described on the spike protein of the recent Danish mink SARS-CoV-2 viruses is so far present in the spike gene of the Swedish mink SARS-CoV-2 viruses. In collaboration with the public health agency, sequencing of viruses from the latest confirmed positive cases in minks and human cases from the same municipalities as the location of the infected mink farms is ongoing.

This information is transmitted to the OIE in the context of Article 1.1.6 in the Terrestrial Animal Health Code in order to provide the relevant information arising from field observations to enable the OIE to have more clarity on which animal species are susceptible to infection and may potentially be involved in the epidemiology of the human disease.

On behalf of the Swedish Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) and OIE Delegate, Dr. Håkan Henrikson,

Yours sincerely,

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Deputy CVO
Sweden