



FUR COMMISSION USA

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Fur Commission USA (FCUSA) Fact Sheet on Coronavirus Cases on US Mink Farms (November 2020)

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. Since then, a total of 12 farms in Utah, Wisconsin and Michigan have currently confirmed positive cases and approximately 15k mink have died (out of a 2020 US population of almost 2 million animals). In each case, illness among the farm workers occurred previous to the animals being infected. At this time there is no evidence that the mink infected the workers.

Farms with positive cases are under strict quarantine with no animals and no animal products entering or leaving the farms. All 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 wildlife-borne diseases.

The virus is primarily affecting older mink and the average per farm outbreak duration is 5-7 days. Older mink tend to succumb to the disease within a few days while younger animals generally recover with clinical signs abating within 7-10 days. After 2-3 weeks, 100% of the mink tested showed antibody responses. Further testing has shown the majority of the mink recover very quickly, with a quality immune response.

How Does This Compare to Outbreaks in Europe?

Unlike in the US, European farms are highly concentrated and near population centers – many of which have experienced significant Covid outbreaks. Additionally, European farms maintain large numbers of animals per farm.

In the most extreme reaction, the Danish government initially called for the culling of all mink in the country. Although many mink have already been destroyed – perhaps needlessly – the government is suspending its initial 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.

How does US production compare to that in Denmark?

The U.S. mink industry is far different and cannot be compared to the Danish mink industry. Denmark produces almost 10 times more mink than the US, in a land area about 1/3 the size of Wisconsin. Within that small area there are over 5 million people and 1200 mink farms. Compare this to the US which has

approximately 120 farms spread out in rural areas across 16 states. Even in the largest domestic producing state, Wisconsin, production is spread among 19 farms all of which are located in outlying rural areas.

Do US mink populations carry the human form of Covid? Does it pose a public health threat?

The CDC, 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 minimal threat to humans, and culling of US farms need not be considered at this time.

Is there a vaccine available?

As with efforts to find a human vaccine, efforts are underway to develop a vaccine for mink. Experts anticipate a vaccine could be available in the spring before the new crop of mink kits. The scientific data being collected on mink will help with the development of a vaccine that will also protect domestic pets, such as cats and dogs.

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, international and federal government agencies to take all necessary precautions to prevent the spread of the disease, protect our workers and the general population, and to develop a vaccine.

For more information on the current status of the outbreaks in the US, contact Dr. Dean Taylor DVM, Utah Department of Agriculture at (801) 982-2235, or Kevin Hoffman, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection at (608) 224-5005.