

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: Additional Control Measures for Dutch Mink Industry In
Response to COVID-19

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Report Highlights:

Based on research conducted by the Dutch government, it is now believed that mink which were infected with the coronavirus (COVID-19) may have transmitted the virus to a farm employee. The relevant study also shows that mink can have the virus without showing any disease symptoms. Based on these developments, the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality and the Minister of Health, Welfare, and Sport will implement a number of control measures. Herein is an unofficial summary/translation of the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality's announcement.

General Information

In late April and early May, four Dutch fur farms were found to have mink that were positive for the coronavirus (COVID-19). For additional information, see [NL2020-0016 - COVID-19 Found on Dutch Mink Farms](#).

Based on the results from the ongoing investigation, the Dutch government has determined that it is plausible that mink transmitted the virus to a farm employee.¹ The study also indicates mink may carry the disease without showing any disease symptoms. Based on these findings, Carola Schouten, the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, and Hugo de Jonge, the Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport, have instructed their respective Ministries to take a number of measures.²

As background, the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality (MANFQ) notes the virus that causes COVID-19 mutates relatively quickly, but that these changes in the genetic code can be monitored. By comparing the genetic code of the virus of different animals and people with each other, a “family tree” can be created, and an image can be obtained of how people and animals have been infected in time and place. This type of research has also been done on infected mink and humans. Through this research the Dutch government has learned that one infected employee at an infected mink farm has been shown to have similarities with the virus found in mink on the same farm. Based on the comparison and the position of the virus in the family tree, it is concluded from this investigation that it is plausible that mink may have infected this employee.

To clarify this further, researchers are currently further mapping the 'genetic pedigree' of infected people from the environment of the infected mink farm in order to obtain the most complete picture possible. Despite this finding, the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) has reiterated that the risk of exposure to the virus outside of the mink house remains negligible.

Control Measures

Based on these new findings, the Cabinet is taking a number of measures in addition to those that have already been introduced. For additional information on previously introduced measures, see [NL2020-0016 - COVID-19 Found on Dutch Mink Farms](#).

The screening of mink farms (for antibodies) is expanded to include all mink farms in the Netherlands (and will be mandatory). In the interest of the health of employees at the farms, MANFQ comments that it is important to get an overview of the situation for all mink farms. The Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA) will coordinate this screening.

If an infection is detected on a farm, the same measures will be applied as at other infected enterprises. There will also be a ban on visitors in the stables of the infected companies, and additional hygiene

¹ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2020/05/19/nieuwe-onderzoeksresultaten-covid-19-bij-nertsenbedrijven>

² By identifying COVID-19 in mink on mink farms as an infectious animal disease according to Article 15 of the Dutch Animal Health and Welfare Act, the government may require additional control measures for the industry.

requirements imposed. Additionally, employees are advised to use protective equipment during their work.

Minister Schouten previously instituted a notification obligation for mink farmers, veterinarians, and persons from research institutions, but these reporting obligations have now been extended to include all symptoms that may indicate a COVID-19 infection in mink. To prevent the possible spread of the virus to other farms, the requirement that animals and manure not leave an infected farm will remain in place.

Farm Cats

MANFQ reports that current research indicates the virus on two of the infected mink farms is very similar. Because antibodies against the virus have been demonstrated in three out of eleven farm cats on one of the infected farms, MANFQ reports it is important to investigate the role farm cats may play in potential virus transmission between farms (which will include participation from the [Netherlands Centre for One Health](#)).³ MANFQ advises that infected mink farms ensure that cats cannot enter or leave the premises.

Pets

MANFQ comments that COVID-19 was previously known to occur in pets, but the risk of people becoming infected by their pets remains small. The existing advice from RIVM on COVID-19 and the handling of animals remains unchanged: keep your animal indoors if there are people in the household with complaints that are pertinent for COVID-19 and/or if the animal is also sick.

Attachments:

[May 19 Letter to House of Representatives from Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality \(in Dutch\).pdf](#)

³ MANFQ defines farm cats as cats that live in the yard and are not socialized.