

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: COVID-19 Found on Additional Dutch Mink Farms

Country: Netherlands

Post: The Hague

Report Category: Agricultural Situation, Agriculture in the News, Livestock and Products

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Report Highlights:

Since late April, six mink farms at eight locations in the Netherlands have identified mink infected with the coronavirus (COVID-19). These farms are in the municipalities of Gemert-Bakel/Milheeze, Laarbeek, Deurne, De Mortel, and Sint Anthonis. There is also a suspected infection at a mink farm in Venray. Control measures were immediately imposed on the infected mink farms after the first detections were made. Measures were later expanded to cover all mink farms in the Netherlands. The National Institute for Public Health and the Environment assesses the risk of human exposure to the virus outside the mink house as negligible. The government awaits the expert opinion of an Outbreak Management Team, but has noted that all conceivable measures will be considered, including the possibility of clearing the infected mink farms.

Background

Two mink farms, located in Gemert-Bakel/Milheeze (home to 13,000 mink) and Laarbeek (home to 7,500 mink) in North Brabant province, detected coronavirus (COVID-19) in mink in late April. The mink showed various symptoms including respiratory and gastrointestinal problems. Investigations were launched to determine the source of the infections. Because some employees had COVID-19 symptoms at both farms, it was assumed that people infected the animals. The initial testing results indicated that no virus was found in the air samples outside the mink house, but the virus was found in dust particle samples taken in the immediate vicinity of mink in the house.

In early May, two additional mink farms, located in Deurne (home to 1,500 mink) and De Mortel (home to 10,000 mink) in North Brabant province, were found to have COVID-19 infections. In response, the same mitigation protocols were implemented, and investigations were initiated. The Ministry reported that human-to-animal transmission does not seem to have been the only cause of the virus at these farms— noting the virus characteristics indicate transmission between mink as well.¹ Accordingly, nearby mink farms began the process of screening animals through blood tests to see if any additional animals in the region had been infected. For additional information, see [NL2020-0016: COVID-19 Found on Dutch Mink Farms](#).

Based on research conducted by the Dutch government, it was subsequently determined that mink which were infected with COVID-19 on two Dutch farms may have transmitted the virus to farm employees. The relevant study also showed 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 implemented a number of additional control measures. For additional information, see [NL2020-0019: Additional Control Measures for Dutch Mink Industry In Response to COVID-19](#). On May 19, 2020, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality and the Ministry of Health, Welfare, and Sport also mandated that Dutch mink farms subject the carcasses of naturally dead animals to laboratory testing for the presence of COVID-19, and provide blood samples to test for the presence of COVID-19 antibodies.

Additional Findings

COVID-19 infections were subsequently found among carcasses from three additional mink farms in the Netherlands (two companies in Sint Anthonis, North Brabant and another in Gemert-Bakel, North Brabant). A fourth company (in Venray, Limburg) is also suspected, but further investigation is ongoing. As a result, the control measures outlined in [NL2020-0019](#) have been imposed on all four of these farms as well.

The National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) continues to assess the risk to local residents as negligible, and indicates that proper use of personal protective equipment in the mink house of an infected farm can prevent infection among employees.

Next Steps

If there is a cross-regional outbreak of infectious disease in the Netherlands, or if there is an international threat of infectious disease, the RIVM can convene an Outbreak Management Team (OMT). An OMT develops an advisory report for the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport. The OMT

¹ The investigation did not identify virus in the dust particles in the air inside or outside the mink houses on these farms.

looking into the ongoing detections of COVID-19 at Dutch mink farms has been asked to include these new results in its advice to the government. The OMT is determining what the risk is that COVID-19 will continue to circulate among infected mink farms and if the disease could eventually become a permanent source of re-infection among humans and animals. Various options are now being prepared in advance of the OMT's advice, with priority being placed on ensuring public health. The Dutch government has reported that all conceivable measures will be considered, including the possibility of clearing the infected mink farms.

Attachments:

[June 1 Letter to House of Representatives from Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport \(in Dutch\).pdf](#)