

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: COVID-19 Found on 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:

Four fur farms in the Netherlands detected coronavirus (COVID-19) in mink, as well as in some cats residing at these farms. The mink showed various symptoms, including respiratory and gastrointestinal problems.

General

Two Dutch 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 is currently 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 response, the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality (the Ministry) issued a reporting obligation for mink farms, veterinarians, and persons in research institutions. Specifically, the Netherlands Food and Consumer Products Safety Authority (known by its Dutch acronym of NVWA) must be informed if respiratory problems or increased mortality are identified in mink. Moreover, in an effort to prevent the possible spread of the virus to other farms, neither animals nor their manure may leave an infected farm.¹ According to the Netherlands' National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (known by its Dutch acronym of RIVM), based on current knowledge about COVID-19, the mink farms do not pose a risk of further spread to humans. While human-to-animal contamination is possible, RIVM reports the impact of this mink contamination on human health is considered negligible.

In early May, two additional mink farms, located in Deuren (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 implemented¹ and investigations were initiated.² 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.³ Accordingly, nearby mink farms have begun the process of screening animals through blood tests to see if any additional animals in the region have been infected.

The RIVM reiterated that human-to-human transmission is the main driver for the spread of COVID-19. However, the RIVM is investigating if: (1) mink can be a transmitter while not having COVID-19 symptoms, (2) if the virus can spread by dust particles (over a long distance) or (3) via manure, and (4) if there is transmission possible between mink and cats. These results are expected by the end of May.

NOTE: Since 2013, there has been [a ban on opening new mink farms or expanding existing operations](#) (in Dutch) in the Netherlands, and mink farming will be completely phased-out as of January 1, 2024.

Attachments:

[April 26 Letter to House of Representatives from Ministry of Agriculture, Nature & Food Quality \(in Dutch\).pdf](#)

[May 8 Letter to House of Representatives from Ministry of Agriculture, Nature & Food Quality \(in Dutch\).pdf](#)

¹ Cycling or walking within a radius of approximately 400 meters around the infected mink farms was initially discouraged and public roads in the 400 meter zone were initially closed (but have since re-opened).

² The study also tested eleven cats at one of the four infected business locations. COVID-19 antibodies were identified in three of these cats. See <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2020/05/15/nieuwe-onderzoeksresultaten-naar-covid-19-bij-dieren>.

³ The investigation did not identify virus in the dust particles in the air inside or outside the mink houses on these farms.