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Subject: PRO/AH/EDR> COVID-19 update (366): animal, USA (UT) mink

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CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 UPDATE (366): ANIMAL, USA (UTAH) MINK

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A ProMED-mail post

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[https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/2020/08/17/coronavirus-mink-first-us-cases/?hpid=hp\\_hp-top-table-main\\_virusminks-630pm%3Ahomepage%2Fstory-ans](https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/2020/08/17/coronavirus-mink-first-us-cases/?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main_virusminks-630pm%3Ahomepage%2Fstory-ans)

Mink at 2 Utah fur farms have tested positive for the virus causing COVID-19 in humans, the Department of Agriculture said Monday [17 Aug 2020], announcing the 1st U.S. cases in a species having been widely culled in Europe following outbreaks there.

Employees at the farms in Utah, the 2nd-largest producer of mink pelts used for coats and other luxury items, also tested positive for the coronavirus, the USDA said. Dean Taylor, Utah's state veterinarian, told reporters on Mon 17 Aug 2020 that state and federal agencies are conducting additional testing to determine whether the mink were infected by humans or vice versa, and whether mink at other farms are sick.

Mink were discovered to be susceptible to the virus in April 2020, when the Netherlands reported outbreaks at several farms, and mink farms in Denmark and Spain were later affected. The 3 countries have since killed more than a million of the animals, according to the Associated Press, but the spread has continued: As of this month [August 2020], at least 27 Dutch farms have been hit. Mink are related to ferrets, which laboratory experiments have shown are highly vulnerable to the virus.

A small number of novel coronavirus cases have been confirmed in dogs, cats, and other animals in the United States and other countries, and scientists and public health agencies say evidence suggests most animals are infected by people and play no meaningful role in the spread of COVID-19. Taylor emphasized on Mon 17 Aug 2020 that "the risk of animals spreading SARS-CoV-2 to humans is considered low," but he noted research has been "limited."

Dutch researchers, however, said genetic analysis strongly suggested mink sickened by humans there passed the virus back to 2 farmworkers, in the world's 1st reports of animal-to-human transmission. That conclusion has prompted calls by infectious diseases researchers for broader study of virus transmission between humans and animals.

In Utah, a state agriculture laboratory performed necropsies on several minks after "unusually large numbers of mink died at the

farms," the USDA said. A Washington State University lab found that samples of 5 animals were positive for the virus, and the USDA's veterinary lab confirmed the results. Taylor said the 2 farms -- which he declined to identify -- have been quarantined, and there are no immediate plans for culling.

"We don't feel like we have enough information to make that decision at this point," Taylor said. "Most of these farms have already got good biosecurity. I don't think they need to worry unduly, but all of us need to take it seriously."

The report of the outbreak is the latest bad news for the U.S. mink industry, which has faced declining production and profits in recent years and has been hard-hit by President Trump's trade war with China, the top buyer of American mink. Production of pelts dropped 15 percent from 2018 to 2019, and the value of those sold dropped 30 percent to USD 59.2 million, according to a July 2020 report from the USDA.

Clayton Beckstead, a mink farmer and regional manager for the Utah Farm Bureau, said in an interview that the declines were partially due to global overproduction of mink. But the pandemic has battered the state's mink farms, about half of which have closed this year [2020]. There are now 38 farms in the state, he said.

"Our main industry is in China. This started with the trade wars, and now nobody can travel, so we haven't been able to sell any product," Beckstead said. Many fur farms have received federal paycheck protection grants, but they are ineligible for relief offered to farmers and ranchers, he said.

This year [2020] "has been terrible," he said. "It's been one thing after another."

The industry already stepped up biosecurity measures when the Dutch outbreaks began, he said, increasing the use of masks, gloves, rubber boots and other protective measures. "This is our livelihood. We want to protect our animals. We want to protect our families and our employees ... we want to stop [the virus] in its tracks."

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[This is stunningly horrible news for the mink industry and for the individuals involved in this situation (the animals, the owners, the workers).

While Covid-19 and the mink industry have been in the news for months in Europe, this is really devastating news to this industry in the US.

While biosecurity had been stepped up (without detailing the specifics), I wonder whether they were testing the employees or taking temperatures? Certainly, the most likely scenario seems to be mink acquiring the disease from humans. However, we know from the European experience that, on occasion, it can transmit from animals to people. So while researchers are focused on vaccines for humans, and rightly so, I wonder how much the vaccine information may eventually be applicable to animals? - Mod.TG]

## See Also

COVID-19 update (365): Germany case data, countries, WHO, global 20200818.7690696

COVID-19 update (364): USA (NC,NY) animal, dog, comment 20200818.7689234

COVID-19 update (363): animal, Denmark (ND) Netherlands (NB,LI) mink, spread 20200817.7687830

COVID-19 update (340): animal, China, enviro monitoring, Netherlands (NB), mink 20200801.7635820  
COVID-19 update (334): animal, Netherlands, mink, spread, UK, cat, 1st rep, OIE 20200727.7617582  
COVID-19 update (324): Netherlands (NB) animal, farmed mink, spread 20200719.7591013  
COVID-19 update (317): Netherlands (NB) animal, farmed mink, spread 20200716.7578453  
COVID-19 update (307): Netherlands (NB), Denmark (ND) farmed mink, spread, control 20200708.7553067  
COVID-19 update (301): Denmark (ND) Netherlands (NB) farmed mink, spread, control 20200703.7536980  
COVID-19 update (284): Denmark (ND) animal, farmed mink, spread, dog 20200624.7506728  
COVID-19 update (281): Netherlands (NB, LI) farmed mink, spread, animal, global 20200623.7502849  
COVID-19 update (266): Denmark (ND) animal, farmed mink, 1st rep 20200617.7479510  
COVID-19 update (251): Netherlands (NB, LI) animal, farmed mink, spread, culling 20200610.7453845  
COVID-19 update (248): Netherlands (NB, LI) animal, mink, spread, culling, cat 20200609.7446478  
COVID-19 update (236): Netherlands (NB, LI) animal, farmed mink, spread, culling 20200604.7427849  
COVID-19 update (230): Netherlands (NB, LI) animal, farmed mink, spread, control 20200602.7420433  
COVID-19 update (215): Netherlands (NB) animal, mink-to-human, epidem., control 20200527.7385049  
COVID-19 update (209): Netherlands (NB) farmed mink, animal-to-human, cat, epid 20200525.7375359  
COVID-19 update (198): Netherlands (NB) farmed mink, animal-to-human infect susp 20200520.7359976  
COVID-19 update (189): Netherlands (NB) animal, farmed mink, research, cat, dog 20200517.7344274  
COVID-19 update (177): Netherlands (NB) animal, farmed mink, Spain (CT) cat susp 20200512.7328587  
COVID-19 update (174): Netherlands (NB) animal, farmed mink, comment 20200511.7323845  
COVID-19 update (169): Netherlands (NB) animal, farmed mink, spread, rabbit susp 20200509.7316646  
COVID-19 update (154): Netherlands (NB) animal, farmed mink, research 20200503.7294846  
COVID-19 update (146): Netherlands (NB) animal, farmed mink, epidemiology 20200501.7286113  
COVID-19 update (135): Netherlands (NB) animal, farmed mink 20200427.7272289

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