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CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 UPDATE (209): NETHERLANDS (NORTH BRABANT), FARMED MINK, ANIMAL-TO-HUMAN, CAT, EPIDEMIOLOGY

A ProMED-mail post

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Date: Mon 25 May 2020

Source: An update letter from the Minister of Agriculture to the Dutch House of Representatives [in Dutch, trans. Mod.AS, abridged, edited]

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/regering/bewindspersonen/carola-schouten/documenten/kamerstukken/2020/05/25/kamerbrief-ontwikkelingen-covid-19-op-nertsbedrijven>

Letter to parliament on developments in COVID-19 on mink farms

[Ministers De Jonge and Schouten report the most recent developments and research results concerning COVID-19 on mink farms].

In our letter dated [Tue 19 May 2020], we have informed you of the state of the research on the mink farms infected with SARS-CoV-2 and a 1st plausible animal-human infection of the COVID-19 virus. We inform you about the latest developments and research results.

Very recently, a 2nd case has become known on one of the infected mink farms where, most likely, SARS-CoV-2 passed from mink to human. In the currently discussed case, the virus was detected in 3 people at the infected farm. The genetic code of these viruses shows great resemblance to the genetic codes found in the mink on the farm. Based on the information available, it is most likely that at least one of the 3 infected persons was infected by a mink. It is not possible from the data to determine whether more than one of these 3 people has been infected from the mink.

In this farm, similarly to the earlier case, the infection probably occurred when it was not yet known that the minks were infected and no personal protective equipment was used. The RIVM [National Institute for Public Health and the Environment] has indicated that the correct and consistent use of personal protective equipment on the premises of an infected mink farm prevents infection. In addition, the RIVM assesses that the risk of exposure of people to the virus outside the mink building is still negligible; this assessment has not been changed by the new research result.

Genetic pedigree

In our previous letter, we reported that researchers are further mapping the 'genetic pedigree' of infected people from the vicinity of the infected mink farm with the 1st plausible mink-human infection, in order to obtain as complete a possible picture. This mapping has now been completed. No viruses with a genetic coding similar to the one on the infected minks were found in the environment; this supports the conclusion that, plausibly, there was infection from mink to humans.

This comparison with viruses from infected people from the area has also taken place on the 2nd farm, with a probable mink-human infection, mentioned above. The 3 genetic codes found in the people at this farm do not match known genetic codes of viruses from Covid-19 patients in the area as well as in the Netherlands [at large]. Among people, also in the surroundings of the affected farm, there was no circulating SARS-CoV-2 strain from which the 3 said genetic codes could have originated.

Farm cats and COVID-19

In our letter of [Tue 19 May 2020], we have reported that 3 farm cats at a contaminated mink farm tested serologically positive. Further research has been carried out on this farm. In total, 7 of the 24 sampled farm cats at this farm were found serologically positive. This means that these positive cats have produced antibodies to the virus. In one of the 7 positive cats, virus was also demonstrated, but its small amount could possibly not allow its genetic code unraveled. No virus was detected in the other 6 seropositive cats. This means that these last 6 cats have undergone SARS-CoV-2 infection but do not excrete the virus anymore. Since cats can be infected with SARS-CoV-2, infected mink farms have previously been advised to ensure that their cats cannot leave the premises.

Screening and measures on mink farms

As stated in the letter of [Tue 19 May 2020], sampling will start for the compulsory screening of all mink farms in the Netherlands. Screening at the farms in the neighborhood of the affected farms have already started. As long as the results of the screening are not known, the veterinary measures already applied on the affected farms will be precautionarily applied on all mink farms in the Netherlands, such as a visitor ban. These measures are now being worked out; your Chamber will be informed about this during the week.

Veterinary epidemiological research in infected farms

Finally, at the end of this week, the results of the veterinary epidemiological research applied on the 3 locations of the 1st 2 infected mink companies will be known. Based on the results, veterinary experts will be able to assess whether SARS-CoV-2 becomes extinct on the mink farms in the foreseeable future, or not. Based on this estimate, experts in the field of human health, supplemented by veterinary expertise, can assess the risk of the infected mink farms for public health.

Based on this advice, we will determine the measures needed to avert this risk. All possible measures will be considered. We will inform your Chamber about this as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

The Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport, Hugo the Young
The Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, Carola Schouten

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<promed@promedmail.org>

[The results of the Dutch research addressing COVID-19 in minks and unowned ("not socialized") cats which reside on mink-

farms' premises, justify the insistence of Minister Carola Schouten to encourage such research effort in spite of earlier expressed assumptions according to which such hazards are negligible. The findings have already led to the application of veterinary control measures to protect the health of workers and others (eg veterinarians) and ban unnecessary visits to the farms. The general public does not seem, so far, to be at risk.

According to a media report (National Geographic magazine, <https://tinyurl.com/yctrhebz>), there are more than 800 000 mink living on Dutch farms and, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, the industry brings in about 100 million US dollars a year. The soft fur of these weasel-like animals, which - in the wild - live in or near water, has long been coveted for clothing, particularly in China, the top importer (and grower, globally) of mink pelts.

Starting in 2013, the Dutch government prohibited the opening of new mink farms, and all existing facilities are required to close by 2024. It has been stated that the mink coronavirus development could hasten the closures.

Checking the COVID-19 situation on China's mink farms is warranted. - Mod.AS

HealthMap/ProMED map available at:

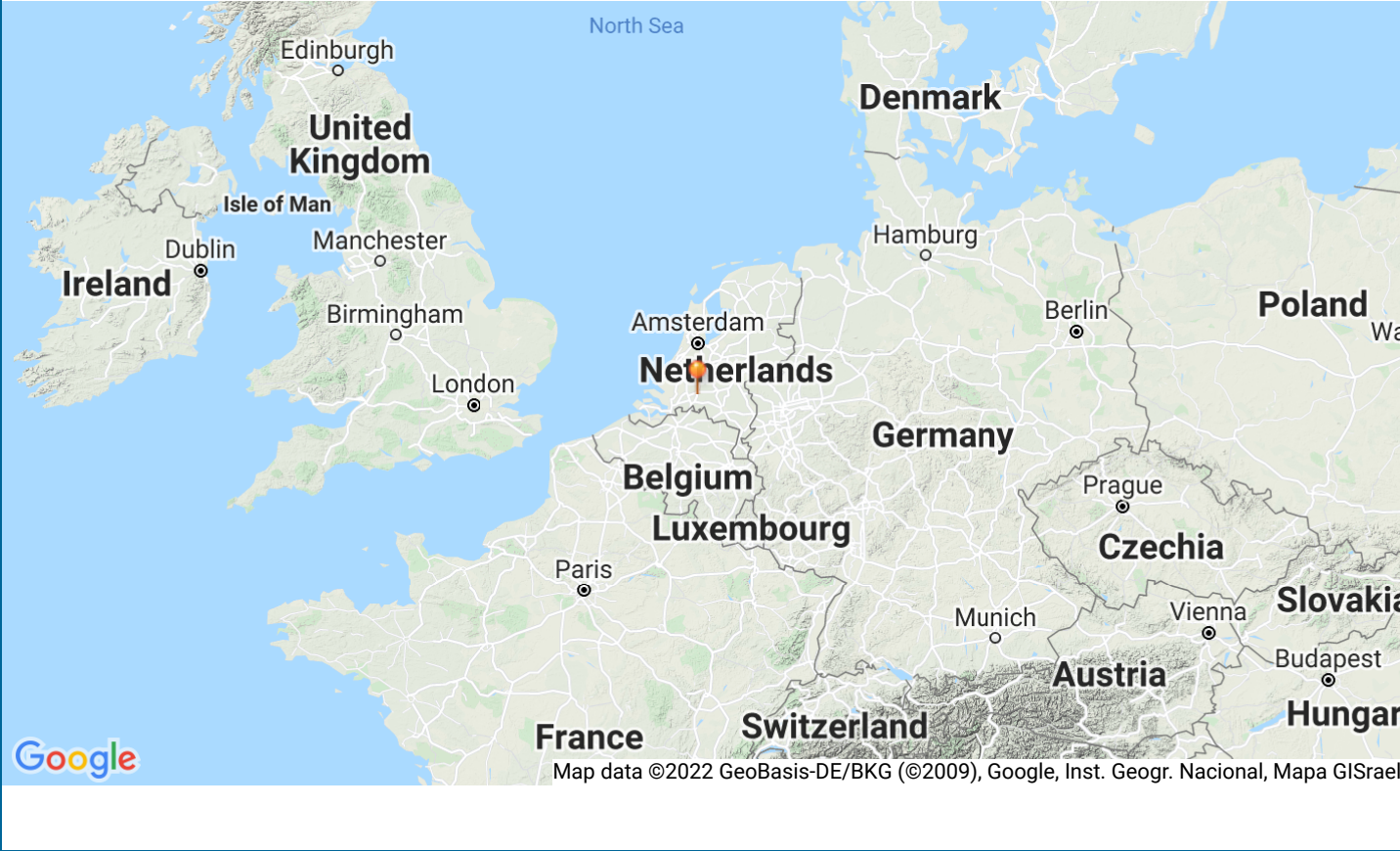
North Brabant, Netherlands: <https://promedmail.org/promed-post?place=7375359,1250>

See Also

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 (183): Japan/USA, animals, research, cat, experimental infection 20200514.7337185
COVID-19 update (181): Germany (BY), France (AC), cat, OIE animal case definition 20200513.7332909
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
COVID-19 update (146): Netherlands (NB) animal, farmed mink, epidemiology 20200501.7286113
COVID-19 update (143): USA (NY) animal, zoo, tiger, lion, tests 20200430.7284183
COVID-19 update (141): India, animal, wild tiger, susp, clarification, RFI 20200430.7281768
COVID-19 update (138): India, animal, wild tiger, fatal 20200428.7275765
COVID-19 update (135): Netherlands (NB) animal, farmed mink 20200427.7272289
COVID-19 update (130): USA (NY) animal, zoo, tiger, lion, new cases 20200425.7266556
COVID-19 update (124): USA (NY) animal, cat, lion, OIE 20200423.7259119
COVID-19 update (123): USA (NY) animal, cat, conf 20200422.7256272
COVID-19 update (113): USA (NY) cat, animal, susp, RFI 20200418.7240811
COVID-19 update (88): Germany, animal, research, pig, chicken, bat, ferret 20200407.7196506
COVID-19 update (85): USA (NY) animal, tiger, OIE 20200406.7191480
COVID-19 update (84): USA animal, tiger 20200406.7191352
COVID-19 update (76): China (HU) animal, cat, owned, stray, seropositive 20200403.7179946
COVID-19 update (75): China (Hong Kong) animal, cat, OIE 20200403.7179945
COVID-19 update (70): China (Hong Kong) animal, cat, pets & stock 20200402.7173286
COVID-19 update (58): Belgium, animal, cat, clinical case, RFI 20200327.7151215
COVID-19 update (56): China (Hong Kong) animal, dog, final serology positive 20200326.7146438
COVID-19 update (50): China (Hong Kong) animal, dog, 2nd case PCR positive, OIE 20200323.7129951
COVID-19 update (45): China (Hong Kong) animal, dog, 2nd case PCR positive 20200319.7112693
COVID-19 update (37): China (Hong Kong) animal, dog, prelim. serology negative 20200312.7081842
COVID-19 update (30): China (Hong Kong) animal, dog, susp, serology pending 20200306.7057595

COVID-19 update (25): China (Hong Kong) animal, dog, susp, OIE 20200302.7040373
COVID-19 update (22): companion animals, dog susp, RFI 20200229.7036661
COVID-19 update (17): China, animal reservoir, wildlife trade & consumption 20200225.7024245
COVID-19 update (11): animal reservoir, intermediate hosts, pangolin susp 20200220.7009213
COVID-19 update (08): companion animals, RFI 20200218.7002276
COVID-19 update (06): animal reservoir, intermediate hosts 20200217.6997782
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