



AD HOC GROUP ON COVID-19 AND SAFE TRADE IN ANIMALS AND ANIMAL PRODUCTS
ELECTRONIC CONSULTATIONS

16 December 2020 to 16 February 2021

Meetings of the OIE *ad hoc* Group on COVID-19 and safe trade in animals and animal products (the Group) were held as videoconferences on 16 December 2020 and 16 February 2021 with interim discussion conducted by exchange of emails.

1. Background

The Group was convened under the authority of the OIE Director General to monitor current scientific knowledge and relevant risk assessments developed by stakeholders on the risks to human health and animal health (if any) associated with COVID-19 and international trade in animals and animal products. The Group also works to ensure the messages and advice provided by the OIE are based on the latest science and (where relevant) aligned with those of CODEX, IPPC, and WHO. The Group's first meeting was held by videoconference on 9 April 2020.

2. Tasks for the current consultation

In response to the latest animal and human events observed in mink farms the Group was tasked with reviewing (and revising, if necessary) its *Considerations on the application of sanitary measures for international trade related to COVID-19* document¹ and the trade-related component of OIE's *Questions and Answers on COVID-19*². In addition, it was asked to assess the risk to human health posed by international trade in mink pelts and, if appropriate, recommend risk mitigation measures.

3. Update of *Considerations* document

The Group revised the fourth bullet point of the 'Considerations' section of the *Considerations* document to reflect the understanding (as of 16 December 2020) that 'SARS-CoV-2 can be transmitted from humans to susceptible species³. In certain circumstances such as intensive mink farming, SARS-CoV-2 can circulate within the animals and be transmitted back to humans. Nevertheless, animals do not play a significant role in the epidemiology of the current COVID-19 pandemic, which is sustained by human-to-human transmission.' The document was updated online on 22 January 2021.

¹ https://www.oie.int/fileadmin/Home/eng/Our_scientific_expertise/docs/pdf/COV-19/A_COVID-19_Considerations_OIE_Sanitary_Measures.pdf

² <https://www.oie.int/en/scientific-expertise/specific-information-and-recommendations/questions-and-answers-on-2019novel-coronavirus/>

³ OIE (2020). - Infection with SARS-CoV-2 in animals. OIE Technical Factsheet. OIE, Paris, France, 6 pp. Available at: www.oie.int/fileadmin/Home/MM/EN_2_Factsheet_SARS-CoV-2_v8_final.pdf (accessed on 16 December 2020).

4. Update of Questions and Answers

The Group made a minor revision to a sentence in response to the question ‘Are there any recommendations related to international movement of live animals or animal products?’ in ‘OIE’s *Questions and Answers on COVID-19*; it now reads ‘*Precautions for packaging materials are not indicated over and above the application of sound principles of environmental sanitation, personal hygiene, and established food hygiene practices.*’ This was also updated online on 22 January 2021.

5. Assessment of the risk to human health posed by international trade in mink pelts

a) Consultation

The Group noted that risks to human health posed by operations on mink farms or the pelting process itself were out of scope for its consideration and that its focus would be on the traded commodity, which should be clearly defined. For the purposes of this consultation, mink pelts were assumed to become contaminated with SARS-CoV-2 during the pelting process because of SARS-CoV-2 infection of the farmed mink⁴—a ‘worst-case’ scenario.

Three experts (0) were consulted to advise the Group on mink farm operations and pelting procedures, and to discuss SARS-CoV-2 survival on mink pelts.

b) International trade

The Group reviewed summary trade data on mink products showing that the value of the world trade in 2018 of commodity 430110⁵ (raw mink furskins, whole; USD 2.09B⁶) was approximately three times that of commodity 430211 (tanned or dressed mink furskins, whole, unassembled; USD 772M⁷).

c) Tanned or dressed mink furskins

The Group considered that standard tanning or dressing processes applied to commodity 430211 (tanned or dressed mink furskins, whole, unassembled) would be sufficient to inactivate SARS-CoV-2, and that this commodity is considered safe for the purposes of international trade, so risk mitigation measures are not required.

d) Raw mink furskins

The Group reviewed the pelting processes explained by the experts. It noted that although the processes are reasonably consistent between processing facilities and around the world, there is variability in the duration of the overall process and in the specific details (including duration) of certain steps considered important for virus inactivation.

For this assessment, the Group considered the term ‘raw mink furskins’ to refer to the skin of mink with fur on it, obtained after killing the animal, that has undergone a multi-stage process including pelting and drying that can be completed on-farm or in offsite facilities. This product is commonly stored under controlled conditions in auction houses and is widely traded internationally as such, or can be further processed (tanned or dressed).

No globally recognised standard protocols or manufacturing practices were identified for inclusion in this commodity definition. The steps or processes identified by the Group as relevant to SARS-CoV-2 inactivation are outlined in Table 1.

⁴ The probabilities of SARS-CoV-2 infection within and between farms were out of scope for consideration.

⁵ Information about harmonised commodity description and coding systems can be found here: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/tradecb/Knowledgebase/50018/Harmonized-Commodity-Description-and-Coding-Systems-HS>; accessed 26 February 2021.

⁶ <https://oec.world/en/profile/hs92/raw-mink-furskins-whole>; accessed 26 February 2021.

⁷ <https://oec.world/en/profile/hs92/tanned-or-dressed-mink-furskins-whole-unassembled>; accessed 26 February 2021.

Table 1 Steps in the mink pelting process of relevance to SARS-CoV-2 inactivation.

Step	Notes
Pre-skinning	The carcasses of whole animals are tumbled (drummed) in batches to remove superficial soiling.
Cooling	The freshly skinned pelt is hung on a rack (inside out) and placed in a cooler, duration varies.
Fleshing	Excess fat and tissue are removed from the outside (non-fur side) of the pelt. This is variably automated.
Cleaning	This automated process (first drumming) removes oils from the skin side.
	The pelt is inverted (so is now fur-side out) and undergoes a second drumming to remove oils from the fur side. Kerosene or detergents may be used, but this is not always the case.
	A variable (but small) proportion of pelts may be washed to remove soil or visible dirt.
Drying	Pelts are dried stretched over boards; duration varies.
Storage	After removal from boards, pelts may be hung for storage (duration varies) before being boxed and shipped to auction companies where they may be stored before sale for up to a year.

The Group noted that the information available on SARS-CoV-2 inactivation (including unpublished experimental research data presented by an expert) suggests that virus survival decreases over time, and that certain detergents could also be effective in reducing virus survival. However, to date, the evidence is not sufficient to consider ‘raw mink furskins’ a safe commodity or to allow definition of appropriate risk mitigation measures such as minimum processing time, or standard use of detergent.

e) **Conclusions**

The Group concluded that:

- commodity 430211 (tanned or dressed mink furskins, whole, unassembled) **can** be considered as a safe commodity for international trade
- commodity 430110 (raw mink furskins, whole) **cannot** be considered as a safe commodity for international trade
- additional evidence is needed to allow determination of appropriate risk mitigation measures for commodity 430110 (raw mink furskins, whole).

.../Appendices

Appendix I

AD HOC GROUP ON COVID-19 AND SAFE TRADE IN ANIMALS AND ANIMAL PRODUCTS

Terms of reference

Purpose

The purpose of this *ad hoc* Group is to monitor current scientific knowledge and relevant risk assessments developed by stakeholders on the risks to human health and animal health (if any) associated with COVID-19 and international trade in animals and animal products. The Group will also work to ensure the consistency and accuracy of messages and advice provided by the OIE and, where relevant, CODEX and IPPC.

Ad hoc Groups are convened under the authority of, and report to, the OIE Director General.

Background

In December 2019, human cases of pneumonia of unknown origin were reported in Wuhan City, Hubei Province of China (People's Rep. of). A new Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) was identified as the causative agent by Chinese Authorities. Since then, human cases have been reported by most countries around the world and the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) event has been declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) to be a pandemic.

The role of animals in the epidemiology of COVID-19 is unclear. The virus may have emerged from bats, but this is not yet certain. On 28 February 2020, a case of an asymptomatic pet dog apparently infected by its owner (a COVID-19 patient) in Hong Kong was reported to the OIE as an emerging disease. Subsequently, there have been reports of infection in other dogs and, more recently, in cats. In addition, animal challenge research has begun in multiple locations around the world, in a variety of species including some livestock as well as dogs and cats.

In the context of COVID-19, the question of whether international trade in animals or animal products may pose a risk to the health of humans or animals must be considered by countries as they attempt to balance the protection of human health against maintenance of the food supply chain. It is important that trade-related decisions are fully informed by science, are no more restrictive than is necessary to provide adequate protection, and consider other strategic imperatives such as food security.

Actions to deliver

This *ad hoc* Group will:

- **monitor** new knowledge related to SARS-CoV-2 that may affect risks to human health or animal health associated with international trade in animals or animal products
- **monitor** risk assessments for animals and animal products regarding SARS-CoV-2 infection
- **recommend** if risk mitigation measures for trade may be justified while balancing science-based risk with other considerations.

Considerations

- Consider the work and progress made by the *ad hoc* Group on COVID-19 and the human-animal interface.
- Consider the updated information and all relevant material provided by a Member or shared by the OIE in preparation of these meetings.
- Ensure a coordinated approach with Codex, and IPPC when relevant, to identify and address potential gaps in the advice provided by these organisations.

Expectations

Ad hoc Group members should:

- sign the OIE Undertaking on Confidentiality of information (if not done already)
- complete the Declaration of Interest Form
- read and study in detail all materials provided by the OIE prior to the meeting
- agree on the appointment of the chair of the meeting
- contribute to online and offline discussions
- contribute to drafting any advice
- understand that the membership of this group may be revised between *ad hoc* group meetings to reflect changing needs and priorities (for example, if additional risk management expertise becomes necessary).

Deliverables

The deliverables of this *ad hoc* Group include:

- text, as appropriate, to add to OIE's Q&A on COVID-19
- reviews or evaluations, as requested, on risk assessments produced by stakeholders
- a report that captures the main discussion points and conclusions of the meeting/s.

Timeline

The *ad hoc* Group will meet online on Thursday 9 April 2020, and afterwards on an *ad hoc* basis in response to emerging information.

Appendix II

AD HOC GROUP ON COVID-19 AND SAFE TRADE IN ANIMALS AND ANIMAL PRODUCTS

ELECTRONIC CONSULTATIONS

16 December 2020 to 16 February 2021

Agenda 16 December 2020

Item	Description	Responsible
1.0	Welcome and expectations	Jenny HUTCHISON (OIE)
2.0	Objective of the meeting	Helen ROBERTS (Meeting Chair)
3.1	First presentation	Tarja SIRONEN (University of Helsinki, Finland)
3.2	Second presentation	Arjan STEGEMAN (The Netherlands)
3.3	Questions	All
4.0	OIE Consideration on the application of sanitary measures for international trade related to COVID-19	Helen ROBERTS
4.1	Discussion	All
5.0	OIE COVID-19 Q&A	Helen ROBERTS
5.1	Discussion	All
6.0	Risk to human health posed by international trade in mink pelts and mitigation measures	Helen ROBERTS
6.1	Discussion	All
7.0	Conclusions and next steps	Helen ROBERTS

Agenda 16 February 2021

Item	Description	Responsible
1	Welcome, introductions, meeting objective	Jenny HUTCHISON (OIE, Meeting Chair)
2	Background (summary of activities to date)	Jenny HUTCHISON (OIE)
3	First presentation (focus: mink pelt value chain - industry expert)	John EASLEY (Fur Commission USA)
4	Second presentation (focus: virus persistence and infectivity on mink pelts)	Tarja SIRONEN (University of Helsinki)
5	Additional questions to experts if indicated.	All
6	What is the product? (Agreement on description)	All
7	Is the product as described a safe commodity?	All
8	Conclusions, identification of next steps	All
9	Any other business?	All
10	Adjournment	All

Appendix III

AD HOC GROUP ON COVID-19 AND SAFE TRADE IN ANIMALS AND ANIMAL PRODUCTS

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