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Skickat: den 1 december 2020 16:53
Till:
Kopia: information.dept

Ämne: Three further cases of infection with SARS-CoV-2 in Swedish mink farms

Dear colleagues,

I hope this information finds you well.

In the framework of the ongoing surveillance in Swedish mink farms, the National Veterinary Institute (SVA) has confirmed 3 further cases of infection with SARS-CoV-2 in mink farms situated in the southeast part of the country, in the County of Blekinge. All positive farms are in the same area as the first case detected, in which approximately 20 of Sweden's 40 mink farms are situated. In total, there are now 13 mink farms confirmed as infected with SARS-CoV-2 in Sweden. No increased morbidity or mortality has been reported from the farms.

The surveillance, initiated mid October, is based on dead minks (aiming at 5 mink per week and farm) submitted to SVA and encompasses all farms in the country. At SVA, samples are collected with swabs from the oral cavity and pharynx and analysed with real-time PCR. Positive samples from each farm are further analysed with whole genome sequencing.

Movement restrictions and strict biosecurity measures have been imposed to all mink farms in Sweden, and not only for those infected.

Notably, Sweden has decided not to stamp out animals at the infected farms at this point. The Swedish mink population is small, approximately 600 000 animals, of which around 80% already were planned to be killed for fur production during November and December. Based on this, it was deemed that a decision to stamp out would have limited additional effect and would not speed up the process of reducing the number of susceptible animals.

The killing and pelting of the mink has now almost come to an end, and will be completed in the middle of this week. When the pelting is finalised, Sweden will only have approximately in total 100 000 breeding minks in its farms. Possible persisting SARS-CoV-2 circulation in remaining breeding mink will be monitored by serological and virological sampling during the coming months.

Through the Public Health Agency, a surveillance scheme targeting humans in contact with mink (mink farm owners and family as well as staff) has been initiated in order to assess the risk for mink-to-human and human-to-mink transmission, and to allow a continuous monitoring of possible virus evolution related to SARS-CoV-2 transmissions in mink farms. Samples collected from positive human cases in the affected municipalities are also followed up with whole genome sequencing

To date all sequenced SARS-CoV-2 strains detected from mink and humans at the infected farms cluster together and belong to the Lineage B.1.1.39. None of the amino acid mutations described on the spike protein of the recent Danish mink SARS-CoV-2 viruses has so far been detected in the spike gene of the Swedish mink SARS-CoV-2 viruses.

This information is transmitted to the OIE in the context of Article 1.1.6 in the Terrestrial Animal Health Code in order to provide the relevant information arising from field observations to enable the OIE to have more clarity on which animal species are susceptible to infection and may potentially be involved in the epidemiology of the human disease.

On behalf of the Swedish Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) and OIE Delegate, Dr. Håkan Henrikson,

Yours sincerely,

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Deputy CVO
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