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Our ref.

DGA / 20129559

Your ref.

Encl.

Date 26 April 2020
Re SARS-CoV-2 infection of minks in the Netherlands

Dear Director General, dear Dr. Eloit,

I provide you the information below based on article 1.1.6.1 of the TAHC of the OIE.

On 23 April 2020, the Animal Health Service (AHS) informed me that in three mink from a mink farm in Milheeze (municipality of Gemert-Bakel, in the province Noord Brabant) SARS-CoV-2 has been detected. The mink had gastrointestinal and respiratory signs and were therefore sent to the AHS for examination and there was increased mortality on the farm. The AHS also tested for the presence of CoV-2 by PCR, which turned out to be positive. Results were confirmed by Wageningen Bioveterinary Research (WBVR) in Lelystad.

Two employees had reported signs resembling COVID-19, but this has not been confirmed with a laboratory test. The SARS-CoV-2 infection in the mink is considered being a case of human to animal transmission.

On 25 April 2020, a second mink farm, in Beek and Donk (municipality of Laarbeek, province Noord Brabant), with 7500 adult mink, also tested positive for SARS-CoV-2. In this farm increased mortality and pneumonia problems were found as well. One of the employees had signs of COVID-19 and the owners had reported flu-like symptoms.

16 April 2020, the Dutch human-veterinary expert group, 'Deskundigenberaad zoönosen' (DBZ), stated that, considering *'the very low global incidence of reports of sick SARS-CoV-2-positive pets, it appears that the likelihood of transmission from humans to animals (specifically cats) is extremely low, but it is possible in occasional cases. Although zoonotic transmission cannot be excluded, the impact on human health is estimated to be negligible in this phase of the epidemic, since effective human-to-human transmission is the driving force of the epidemic.'*

The National Institute for Public Health and the Environment in Bilthoven (RIVM) concluded that the infected mink farms do not pose an additional risk to public health. However, together with the Municipal Health Services (GGD) and the RIVM, an advice for personal protection for employees and mink farmers has been provided.

We also take measures with respect to these infected mink farms. Based on the Dutch Health and Welfare Act it is not allowed to move the animals or any manure from this farm until further notice, in order to prevent any spread of the virus to other farms. In addition, we have an obligation for mink farmers, veterinarians and employees of research institutes to notify any clinical signs on mink farms resembling COVID-19. This obligation also makes it possible to do more research on mink farms to gain more epidemiological knowledge of COVID-19 in mink.

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This research will be carried out as soon as possible. In that respect we will carry out further examinations on these farms and in the environment to get more insight in the epidemiology, and further spread of the infection. This includes clinical, pathological and virological examination of diseased or dead mink, sequencing of virus isolates obtained from mink from these farms, and serological examination of mink, carried out three times within a period of six weeks. Although the virus is expected only to spread over short distances as it does between humans, we will also collect and examine dust samples in the surroundings as precautionary measure.

Finally, in consultation with RIVM, it was decided to close the public roads around the farm for pedestrians and cyclists until the results of the tests are known, which is expected to be known within a few weeks.

I keep you informed about further developments.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'C' followed by a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dr. Christianne Brusckhe
Chief Veterinary Officer of the Netherlands