

**Veterinary Ireland Media Release
19th November 2020**



Mink Farms Statement

Veterinary Ireland published a policy on Fur Farming in Ireland in November 2018 ([copy attached](#)). The policy recommended an immediate ban on the farming of mink, and other similar wild animals, for the production of fur, on welfare grounds.

Veterinary Ireland welcomed the decision of the last Government announced in June 2019 to phase out fur farming in Ireland and the commitment in the current Programme for Government to draft legislation to enable this as soon as possible.

Whilst there is no evidence as yet of mink in Ireland being infected with SARS-CoV-2, given that the core decision to phase out fur farming has already been made, it would seem wise, on the precautionary principle, to expedite this closure of mink farms, thus removing the risk mink potentially pose to public health.

Further information:

Mink are extremely susceptible to SARS-CoV-2 and can develop clinical signs with a relatively high mortality rate. In Denmark recently 207 farms were infected and in 5 farms authorities have isolated the recently reported mutated variant of the virus.

Known as “cluster five”, the variant has four separate mutations in the spike protein on the viral envelope. This is the part of the virus that vaccines are being developed to target.

So far 6 farm workers have been identified as becoming infected with this mutated variant from the mink (i.e. zoonotic transmission) and more concerningly it has been shown that at least 6 further people were in turn infected by those farm workers (community transmission). This is the reason for the complete lockdown in the affected parts of Denmark and the reason for the cull of mink there.

The mutated virus has been detected retrospectively at a mink farm in The Netherlands, according to a leading Dutch expert. The mink there were culled and there is no evidence to date that they infected humans.

In total five countries have reported SARS-CoV-2 outbreaks at mink farms - Denmark, The Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Italy and the USA.

It is not yet known if this mutated variant will be equally or less controllable by the current vaccines in development - only time will tell - but there is, at the very least, a potential risk that such a mutated variant may not be 'covered' by these vaccines.

ENDS

Date: 19th November 2020

Media enquiries on behalf of Veterinary Ireland to:

Antonina Ni Dhuinn, Progress Communications
Tel: 087- 265 3683 nina@progresspr.ie