

## Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport

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**Our reference**

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Date 9 June 2020  
Subject Update on COVID-19 and minks

Dear Chairman,

In our letter of 3 June 2020 we informed the House on our policy regarding infected mink farms and provided an overview of the latest findings at mink farms. We are writing now to provide the House with an update on the number of outbreaks.

### **Detection pathways**

As we previously informed the House, since the first notification of SARS-CoV-2 infection at a mink farm, three measures have been in place to identify further outbreaks at farms. These measures are:

1. the notification requirement for farm owners, veterinarians and laboratories;
2. mandatory early warning testing (weekly submission of dead animals);
3. mandatory serological screening at farms (antibody tests).

### **Current number of infected farms**

Thus far in our letters to the House we have made reference to the number of infected farms and the number of infected locations. Some mink farm owners have mink sheds at different locations. In order to avoid confusion, we will henceforth refer only to the number of infected farms, with each location being regarded as a separate farm.

Since 23 April 2020 the number of infected mink farms has increased to 13 (as of 16.00 on 9 June). Since our previous letter of 3 June 2020, infection with SARS-CoV-2 has been confirmed at four more farms. At three of these farms the outbreaks were discovered through early warning testing. At the fourth a notification was made. Two of the farms are located in Landhorst, the others are in Volkel and Castenray.

The source of infection is unknown. The Netherlands Food and Consumer Product Safety Authority (NVWA) is tracing the source in each case and is in contact with the municipal health service (GGD) regarding the possible testing of farm workers. In addition, the available virus isolates are being investigated. This may provide further insight into how the farms became infected.

Sample collection for the serological screening of all mink farms in the Netherlands has been completed. The test results will be available at the end of this week. Based on these results, we will decide whether and how to continue serological screening in the period ahead.

The above shows that all three detection pathways are being applied and adhered to.

### **Culling of mink at infected farms**

On 3 June we informed the House of the government's decision to cull the animals at infected farms, starting on 5 June. Due to an injunction granted by the Trade and Industry Appeals Tribunal (*College van Beroep voor het bedrijfsleven*; CBB) the start date was postponed. Animals Rights and *Bont voor Dieren* (Fur for Animals) had applied for an injunction to suspend the culling. On Friday 5 June a hearing was held and on Friday evening the tribunal issued a decision denying the application for mink at infected farms not to be culled. The tribunal's statement of the grounds for its decision is expected in two weeks.

The NVWA began culling animals at the first farm on the morning of Saturday 6 June. Two to three farms can be dealt with per day. The animals at the most recently infected farms will be valued this week and will then be killed and the carcasses rendered.

The NVWA is overseeing the culling and maintains close contact with the farms' owners. It reports that the culling is proceeding smoothly and that the animals are being treated with due care. Cooperation with farm workers is good. The Animal Diseases Welfare Committee established by the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality has observed the culling and will draw up a report.

The national measures, including the hygiene protocol and the bans on transporting mink and visiting mink sheds, still apply. Weekly early warning testing and the notification requirement are also still in place. As regards screening, we will decide after the results are announced this week in what form screening will be continued.

We will keep the House informed about the results of screening and developments regarding the number of outbreaks.

Yours sincerely,

the minister of Health, Welfare and Sport,

the minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality,

Hugo de Jonge

Carola Schouten