

Public Health Guidance for Farmers and Workers on Mink Farms

Overview

Recent evidence suggests that mink farms are at risk of widespread infection of COVID-19. Danish authorities have reported widespread outbreaks on 289 farms since June, 2020. To protect public health and the mink farming industry in New Brunswick, New Brunswick Public Health (NBPH) and New Brunswick Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries (DAAF) have the following recommendations for mink farm operators. Recommendations to this guidance may be updated as dictated by emerging science.

Testing for Farm Operators

- Mink farm operators must conduct a risk assessment of their operation, then develop and implement a COVID-19 Operational Plan. Visit the WSNB website for details and templates at www.worksafe.nb and at the NBPH's *Coronavirus webpage*.
- Post signage on the farm to inform individuals about SARS-CoV-2 biosecurity requirements.
- Active screening of workers and all farm visitors is recommended at the main entry point. Active screening templates are available at www.worksafe.nb. Active screening must be performed upon arrival at the farm and at least once every five hours thereafter.
- Educate all employees on signs of COVID-19. If any farm workers or visitors have symptoms of COVID-19, it is critical that they do not access any part of the farm including farm equipment, vehicles, feed, manure, animals and get testing as soon as possible. Follow the recommendations for isolation from 811 Telecare, or from the online self-assessment at the NBPH's *Coronavirus webpage*.
- Log the name, date and time, and contact information of all employees and visitors, including service providers, upon arrival. Restrict access to the farm, animal housing and feed storage areas to only essential workers.
- Maintain a log of movements of animals, carcasses, manure and equipment for tracing purposes.
- Installation and use of easily accessible handwashing stations are recommended for employees to use upon arrival, immediately after undergoing active screening. If a handwash sink is not available, use hand sanitizers with a Health Canada Drug Identification Number (DIN). Hand sanitizer stations should be located at convenient places throughout the facility.
- If symptoms are present, stay home and call 811 Telecare or use the [online COVID-19 Self-Assessment](#). If testing is recommended, get tested and follow isolation recommendations. If a farm operator or employee tests positive, this will trigger an investigation by the RMOH. The RMOH will advise of appropriate PH measures and action.

PPE Requirements

General

- Follow all personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements in accordance with a risk assessment that follows WorkSafeNB's occupational health and safety (OHS) legislation.

- Community masks must be used in accordance with the *New Brunswick Renewed and Revised Mandatory Order COVID-19*. Masks should be in accordance with recommendations in the NBPH [Mandatory Masks – FAQ](#). Where minks are present, refer to PPE recommendations in the following section.
- Train all employees on the proper use of person protective equipment (PPE).

Handling of Animals

- All individuals who interact with mink should use the same precautions as they would when interacting with other people.
- Minimize close contact with animals for all staff. Maintain physical distancing of 2 meters from people and animals, whenever possible.
- Promote and facilitate personal preventive practices (e.g., frequent hand hygiene, avoid touching the face, respiratory etiquette, clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and equipment with approved products).
- Require the use of dedicated outer clothing (e.g. coveralls) and footwear when working on the farm.
- Clean and disinfect footwear using approved products, before and after entering mink sheds.
- Launder farm clothing daily. If outerwear cannot be laundered onsite, it should be placed in a closed bag or container for transport and handled as potentially contaminated material. Items should be routinely laundered and hot-air dried. Public laundry facilities should not be used.
- Sharing of equipment, tools, supplies and workers between farms should be discouraged.
- Develop a business contingency plan, in advance, for situations if workers get sick or need to self-isolate. Follow the [Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farmed Mink](#) (AAFC, 2013).
- Follow all biosecurity measures in accordance with [National Farm - Level Mink Biosecurity Standard - Producers' Guide](#) (CFIA, 2016).
- **Additional COVID-19 specific PPE is recommended when handling animals, including:**
 - Single use disposable gloves;
 - N95 masks or respirators, and face shields;
 - Gowns made of impermeable material which can be disinfected after each use.
- Either disposable N95 masks or reusable respirators equipped with N95 cartridges may be used. All N95 masks must be “fit-tested”. This means that every two years, a qualified technician must test and certify N95 devices, and provide the user a card verifying that the device has been fit tested. Do not share N95 masks or respirators between workers.

If PPE standards and/or biosecurity measures have not been met, workers should contact 811 Telecare or the online self-assessment and follow their recommendations.

Disinfectants

- Disinfectants must be effective against COVID-19. Visit Health Canada’s *List of Hard-surface Disinfectants and Hand Sanitizers* (COVID-19) to confirm: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>.
- A common household disinfectant that is effective against COVID-19 is a simple bleach and water solution. Check the expiration date on the bleach bottle to ensure it is still strong

enough to use. A freshly opened bottle of bleach with a good expiration date on the bottle is best.

- Mix 4 teaspoons (20 mL) of regular household bleach with 4 cups (1000 mL) of lukewarm, clean drinking water. [Refer to NBPH guidance here.](#)
- Completely wet the area being disinfected using a sprayer or wiping cloths and a bucket. If using wiping cloths, change and remix the solution frequently or when it becomes cloudy.
- Be sure to wash your hands after each use, and any equipment being used (i.e. keep the sprayer, concentrated bleach bottle and buckets clean and sanitized too).
- This solution can smell very strong, so be sure to use gloves and safety glasses, and use in a well-ventilated area.

Active Surveillance and Outbreak Management

- At a minimum, all producers should monitor mink daily for clinical signs of SARS-CoV-2 infections. All farm staff should be educated on recognizing clinical signs of infection in animals, which could include any of the following:
 - Respiratory signs (e.g. difficulty breathing, sneezing, coughing)
 - Discharge from nose and eyes
 - Sudden drop in feed consumption
 - Diarrhea
 - Vomiting
 - Lethargy
 - Increased mortality
- Mink, like humans, can be subclinically infected without showing any signs of illness and with no notable increase in farm mortality.
- If presence of SARS-CoV-2 is suspected in the mink, producers should immediately contact their veterinarian for a disease investigation. The veterinarian should then notify the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO).
- Triggers for active surveillance at the farm level may be defined as:
 - A confirmed COVID-19 infection in a farm worker or a producer on-farm.
 - An epidemiological link to another mink farm that has been confirmed or suspected.
- Active surveillance should commence within one week, which is the ideal timeframe for early detection.
- Fifteen (15) animals should be tested per farm affected, per week. Dead and sick minks should be chosen for testing, if available. The remaining total may be randomly selected from the healthy animal population.
- Testing of animals should be conducted for at least two weeks from the active surveillance trigger date.
- Samples must be collected by qualified personnel and properly shipped to the National Microbiology Laboratory in Winnipeg for analysis.
- Detection of SARS-CoV-2 in any minks must be reported to the Provincial Veterinarian, Department of Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries, as well as the Regional Medical Officer of Health, Department of Health.

If an outbreak is declared by provincial authorities, the investigation and outbreak response will be led by the Regional Medical Officer of Health.

Depopulation and Carcass Disposal

- The decision to depopulate a farm will be made by a Provincial Veterinarian and/or a Medical Officer of Health.
- Carcass disposal of animals confirmed or suspected of having SARS-CoV-2, or depopulated as a SARS-CoV-2 outbreak response, must comply with the [Abattoir Waste and Carcass Disposal Guidelines \(2014\)](#).
- Ensure all COVID-19 specific PPE is donned during all carcass disposal activities including managing compost containing carcasses of animals confirmed or suspected of having SARS-CoV-2.

Additional Resources

The following is a partial list of qualified fit-testing technicians in New Brunswick:

All-Tech Environmental Services Ltd.

Branch Office
Contact: Brian Fraser
185 Old Black River Road
Saint John, New Brunswick, E2R 1A3
Bus: 506 658 1058 Fax: 506.652.7998

All-Tech Environmental Services Ltd.

Satellite Office
Contact: Brian Fraser
Moncton, New Brunswick
Bus: 506 384 7246
E-Mail: bafraser@toalltech.com

Pinchin LeBlanc Environmental Ltd.

53 King St., Suite 300,
Saint John, NB. E2L 1G5
Contact: Richard Frenette
Tel: (506) 633-1466
Have an Occupational Hygienist in Dartmouth,
as a resource or for advice

RPC

921 College Hill Road
Fredericton, NB
E3B 6Z9
Contact: Dr. Diane Botelho
Tel: (506) 452 1212 or 1 800 563-0844

- Abattoir Waste and Carcass Disposal Guidelines (2014):
<https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/10/pdf/Agriculture/AbattoirWasteCarcassDisposalGuidelines.pdf>
- Cleaning and Disinfection for COVID-19 (2020):
https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/h-s/pdf/Cleaning_DisinfectingE.pdf
- Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farmed Mink (2013):
http://www.nfacc.ca/pdfs/codes/mink_code_of_practice.pdf
- COVID-19 Self-Assessment (2020):
https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/ocmoh/cdc/content/respiratory_diseases/coronavirus/coronavirusexposure.html#/app/symptom-checker/guides/399/what-to-do
- Hard-surface disinfectants and hand sanitizers (COVID-19): List of disinfectants with evidence for use against COVID-19 (2020):
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/drugs-health-products/disinfectants/covid-19/list.html>
- Mandatory Masks – FAQ (2020):
<https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/eco-bce/Promo/covid-19/MandatoryMasksFAQ.pdf>

- National Farm - Level Mink Biosecurity Standard - Producers' Guide (2016):
<https://www.inspection.gc.ca/animal-health/terrestrial-animals/biosecurity/standards-and-principles/mink/eng/1377173051041/1377173051775>
- New Brunswick Public Health – Coronavirus (2020):
https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/ocmoh/cdc/content/respiratory_diseases/coronavirus.html
- WorkSafeNB – COVID 19: What you need to know (2020):
<https://www.worksafenb.ca/safety-topics/covid-19/covid-19-what-you-need-to-know/>