

BCSPCA

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News and Features from the BC Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

B.C. government must ban fur farming in wake of third COVID-19 outbreak on local mink farm

First Nations, animal protection groups, epidemiologists call on B.C. government to act with urgency

May 19, 2021. For immediate release.

In the wake of a third outbreak of COVID-19 on a factory mink fur farm in British Columbia, the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), concerned infectious disease specialists, the BCSPCA, the Fur-Bearers, and Humane Society International/Canada are calling on the B.C. government to act now to end fur farming.

During the past year, more than 400 outbreaks of COVID-19—and mutations of the virus—have occurred on factory fur farms globally, with many nations taking decisive action to stop fur farming in their jurisdictions.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the UBCIC stated, "We are renewing our call for an end to fur farming in B.C. This industry not only goes against Indigenous values of wildlife stewardship and conservation, but also has proven to be an unmanageable threat to public health. The unnecessary and deeply troubling suffering minks are subjected to -- lifelong confinement in cramped and filthy cages -- only promotes the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory viral infections."

Dr. Jan Hajek, infectious diseases specialist at Vancouver General Hospital stated: "Clearly the measures put in place by the B.C. government have failed to prevent COVID-19 outbreaks on large mink breeding facilities. Given the very real threat of viral mutations and the transmission of virus between animals and people in these facilities, the B.C. government should now act decisively, prohibit and end industrial fur farming in the interest of public health and animal welfare, and provide mink breeders with financial assistance and support to transition out of this industry."

Dr. Sara Dubois, BC SPCA Chief Scientific Officer, said "Having been on B.C. fur farms and seen the conditions firsthand, I can attest that the practice is inherently inhumane and subjects animals wild in nature to treatment that no B.C. resident would tolerate. Fur farming exists in direct opposition to the values of

British Columbians and the continuation of this industry would present unacceptable outcomes for both animals and people.”

Lesley Fox, executive director of the Fur-Bearers, said “Despite repeated calls for the BC Government to stop restocking of fur farms in the wake of COVID-19 outbreaks, no action was taken. This latest outbreak is a direct consequence of government catering to industry interests at the expense animal welfare, public health, and the B.C. economy. The B.C. government must act now to shut down this industry for good.”

Kelly Butler, HSI/Canada wildlife campaigner, stated “The world community is taking urgent action to end fur farming because it is inherently inhumane, environmentally destructive, and poses a grave public health risk. More than 20 countries have already stopped fur farming within their jurisdictions and the B.C. government must follow the lead of these nations and end this cruel, high risk, outdated and needless industry.”

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Facts:

- **Since 2014, British Columbians have provided at least \$6.5 million in subsidies through the AgriStability benefits to B.C. fur farmers.**
- Over 20 countries have stopped fur farming, including Belgium, Japan, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.
- British Columbia currently has 11 fur farms in operation. 10 mink farms, 1 chinchilla farm. All mink farms are located in the Fraser Valley.
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- A 2020 poll conducted by BC public opinion firm Research Co., found that 85% of the population of BC are opposed to killing animals for their fur.
- The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organisation For Animal Health (OIE), and the World Health Organization (WHO) published a risk assessment for fur farms: SARS-CoV-2 in animals used for fur farming: GLEWS+ risk assessment. The risk assessment identified Canada has having a “very likely” likelihood of introduction and spread of SARS-CoV-2 within fur farms, and a “likely” likelihood of transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus from fur farms to susceptible wildlife populations.

Timeline:

June 2020 – In wake of COVID-19 outbreaks on European fur farms, BC SPCA warns the Ministry of Agriculture of the risk to BC and need for a pandemic plan

Dec 2020 – COVID outbreak occurs on a BC fur farm - [link](#)

Dec 2020 – The Fur-Bearers, HSI/Canada, BC SPCA and infectious disease experts call on BC government to end fur farming - [link](#), [link](#), [link](#)

Dec 2020 - COVID outbreak occurs on a second BC fur farm, at least 200 mink dead - [link](#)

Jan 2021 - The Fur-Bearers, HSI/Canada, BC SPCA and infectious disease expert meet with BC Agriculture Minister and government officials and again call on BC government to end fur farming

Jan 2021 - 1000 mink culled on BC fur farm after outbreak - [link](#)

Jan 2021 - David Suzuki and other scientists call for an end to fur farming in BC - [link](#)

March 2021 - Breeding resumes in BC despite previous COVID outbreaks - [link](#)

April 2021 - Union of BC Indian Chiefs calls for a moratorium on fur farming in the province - [link](#)

April 2021 – Infectious disease experts and BC doctors appeal to Ministry of Health about spillover risks - [link](#)