

Agency: First US virus cases in mink found at 2 Utah farms

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Coronavirus. Credit: European Centers for Disease Control

Officials on Monday confirmed the first U.S. cases of mink infected with the coronavirus following outbreaks in Europe.

Five infected mink have been identified at two large farms in Utah, the Department of Agriculture announced. Testing began after the farms

reported unusually high mortality rates among the small animals raised for their fur prized in coats and other clothing.

The Utah mink farms have also reported cases among workers. Infected humans can spread the virus to animals during close contact, but there is no current evidence that animals spread the disease to humans, authorities said. Officials are investigating how the disease spread to the farms.

The impacted farms in Utah have been quarantined to stop the spread of the virus. The state is one of the top mink breeders in the country, said state veterinarian Dr. Dean Taylor.

Scientists believe the coronavirus that first infected people in China initially came from an animal source, probably bats, and later spread from person to person.

Some animals, including cats and dogs, have picked up the coronavirus from people as it spread around the world.

Scientists are studying outbreaks in Denmark, Spain and the Netherlands and exploring whether workers could have caught the virus from minks and, if so, how much of a further threat that type of transmission might pose.

More than 1 million minks were killed on Dutch farms with outbreaks to prevent the spread of the disease. There are no similar plans in Utah, Taylor said. State officials will instruct operators on bio-security measures to help prevent future spread, he said.

The coronavirus causes fever and cough in humans that clear up a few weeks for most people, but it can lead to pneumonia and death for some, especially older people and those with underlying health problems.

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