



August 6, 2021

The Honourable Patty Hadju
Minister of Health
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

RE: Addressing COVID-19 risks posed by fur farming at G20 summit

Dear Honourable Minister Hadju:

Last Chance for Animals (LCA) is an international non-profit organization, based in Los Angeles, CA, that has been working in Canada since 2016 to improve conditions for animals and to eliminate animal exploitation.

I am writing regarding the upcoming G20 summit in Rome. In view of the ongoing threat posed to both public health and the global economy by COVID-19, I am urging that Canada take the lead in commencing a global discussion about the need to eliminate the coronavirus reservoirs posed by fur farms.

Since the first cases of COVID-19 were originally reported on mink farms in the The Netherlands in April 2020, the virus has been detected on more than 430 mink fur farms across twelve countries in Europe and North America. Transmission from human to mink, mink to mink, and mink to human have all been recorded with spill over transmission to humans reported in the Netherlands, Denmark, Poland and potentially the United States.¹ While the origins of the pandemic remain unclear, scientists are concerned the virus may have originated on fur farms.²

Due to public health concerns, around 20 million mink have been culled under governmental order by various countries; Denmark alone has culled 17 million mink. Mink breeding has been suspended in four countries for the duration of 2021. Nonetheless, mink farming continues in most countries, including Canada, where the practice is still legal, and outbreaks of COVID-19 continue to be recorded on mink farms.

¹ CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/animals.html> & OIE: <https://www.oie.int/app/uploads/2021/06/en-oie-guidance-farmed-animals-.pdf>

² <https://reporterre.net/Mounting-evidence-suggests-mink-farms-in-China-could-be-the-cradle-of-Covid-19-22020>

Since December 2020, there have been outbreaks of COVID-19 on three mink fur farms in British Columbia's Fraser Valley region. Currently, the B.C. Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, has enacted a moratorium to stop new mink farms from opening and has put a cap on the existing number of minks on all farms.³ While LCA commends this move by the B.C. Government, these actions are not enough.

If this coronavirus continues to circulate in human populations, the presence of farmed mink means that zoonotic reservoirs can easily be established with a risk of infection with the COVID-19 virus between humans and mink. As is becoming clear with the Delta variant of the virus in humans, people are still susceptible to contracting the virus and becoming sick despite having been fully vaccinated. For as long as people are still vulnerable to the virus, allowing a species, which is bred exclusively for its fur, to continue to act as a potential zoonotic reservoir is unacceptable.

Fur farming also comes at a high cost to animal welfare. LCA conducted an undercover investigation, that spanned the course of a year, into Millbank Fur Farm, a mink farm in Ontario that houses approx. 40,000 minks. The investigation uncovered unsanitary conditions and an ongoing pattern of animal neglect. Earlier this year, Millbank plead guilty to failing to meet the prescribed standards of animal care under section 11.1(1) of the *Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*.⁴

Along with other member organizations of the Fur Free Alliance, we are collecting signatures on an international "Stop Deadly Fur" petition, calling on G20 leaders to take action to eliminate fur farming. Global signatures currently stand at over 600,000 and are growing rapidly.

The Canadian government has done an admirable job managing the COVID-19 pandemic. The sweeping measures taken to protect Canadians make it clear that your government cares about Canadians and is working hard to end the pandemic. I commend your well-coordinated effort and reliance on scientific based evidence in achieving one of the highest vaccination rates in the world. To continue these measures and your commitment to protecting Canadians, I urge you to take the spread of COVID-19 on fur farms seriously.

³ <https://bc.ctvnews.ca/new-rules-for-b-c-mink-farms-effective-immediately-after-several-more-test-positive-for-covid-causing-virus-1.5523747>

⁴ <https://www.lcanimal.org/index.php/investigations/investigations-in-the-field/millbank-fur-farm>

In closing, I ask that Canada use its voice at the upcoming G20 meetings, including the G20 Health Working Group meeting on 4th September, the Health Ministers' Meeting on 5th and 6th September, and the G20 Leaders' Summit on 30th and 31st October. All these meetings will be an opportunity for you to discuss the need to eliminate the practice of fur farming as one of the many strategies needed to bring the COVID-19 pandemic to an end.

For the animals,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris DeRose", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Chris DeRose
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