



Risky Business: The Dangers of Zoonotic Disease in the Fur Trade (2024)

Webpage: bornfreeusa.org/riskybusiness

Type of Resource: Report, photos, interactive graphic.

Campaign Focus: Fur Trade.

Objectives: Explore the diseases that can be transferred between animals and people and highlight the unsanitary and highly stressful conditions in the fur farming industry that exacerbate the chances of harmful diseases spreading. These diseases, primarily including COVID-19 and highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), pose immediate threats to human public health and safety. Our research highlights the magnitude of the threat this industry presents in the United States using global data from past zoonotic disease outbreaks that originated from animal sources to inform crucial future legislation that could ban the practice for good.

KEY FINDINGS

Most of the major pandemics in recent history, including SARS, Ebola, MERS-CoV, COVID-19, and HPAI originated from animal sources, yet practices that facilitate disease spread between humans and animals, like fur farming, are still legal and abundant in the U.S.

At least 250 mink fur farms operate across 21 states in the U.S. alone, which collectively generate approximately 3 million pelts per year. Minks pose an elevated risk to public health because they have a similar upper respiratory tract to humans, meaning that they can become infected by and transmit some of the same respiratory viruses, including avian and influenza viruses. The ability of minks to acquire and spread human and animal respiratory viruses renders them potentially potent “mixing vessels” for generating novel pandemic viruses by reassorting currently circulating influenza viruses.

Fur farms also pose serious environmental contamination risks that can adversely affect the health of the wildlife, natural resources, and humans that surround these facilities via carcinogenic chemicals used to preserve pelts, toxic runoff that pollutes waterways, and the improper disposal of biohazardous waste (including mink bodies and waste).

SUMMARY

This work illuminates the consequences the fur farming industry will inevitably have on future human public health, wildlife conservation, and biological diversity if allowed to continue unchecked.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We urge federal lawmakers to support the Mink VIRUS Act – a bill that would ban mink farming across the U.S. – before the next pandemic outbreak.

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