

MINKS Are Superspreaders Act

Mink farms are inhumane. The wild, solitary, territorial animals are kept in small, barren cages that create such stressful and unnatural conditions that the animals exhibit high levels of aggression, **including cannibalism**.

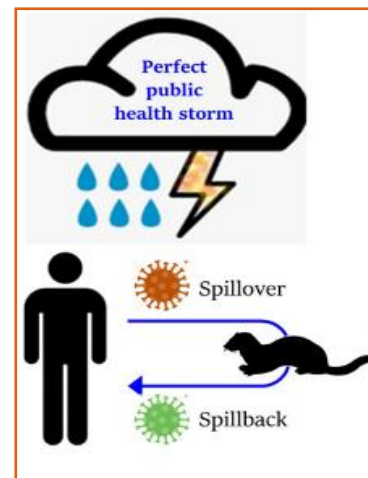
The animals are kept in groups in these cages on factory farms to produce pelts of no interest to domestic consumers and which are primarily exported to China for high-end elites there. This is a failing industry, with domestic production down 80 percent from the last decade. The remaining 50 or so mink farms, concentrated in just two states, remain a horror for the animals. Moreover, the farms continue to be a threat to spill over deadly zoonotic diseases to humans and to wild mink. Mink are the only species documented to spillover mutated forms of the COVID-19 virus to people, and now the concern is that they might also become a significant zoonotic vehicle for a much more virulent H5N1 (bird flu) virus. Finland and Spain have recently had outbreaks of H5N1, and that has been an **immense concern to scientists and public health officials**.

Mink are bilateral transmitters of SARS-CoV-2 and pose a serious risk of spreading the virus and incubating variants.

Prior to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, there were approximately 60 million mink killed worldwide for their pelts, with Europe producing half the output and the United States, 5 percent. In 2020-23, there were viral outbreaks on more than 450 mink farms in the West, with at least three variants developing in Denmark, France, and the United States.

It makes little sense to keep afloat a dying, **subsidized mink industry** — with about 50 farms, producing 1.2 million pelts — that threatens human and wildlife health just to produce a luxury fashion item. With almost zero commercial sales of fur in the United States, mink are factory-farmed for pelts for export, with nearly all pelts sold to high-end consumers in China. Elites in China get the coats while outsourcing the viral risk to our homeland.

Farmed mink are highly susceptible to and readily transmit and amplify avian-, human-, and mammalian- (e.g. swine) influenza A strains. This includes the pandemic zoonotic bird flu H5N1 mink mutant strain that infected and caused the deaths of more than 200,000 farmed



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mink on six farms in Spain and Finland in 2022-2023. This bird flu strain has killed 461 of 882 human cases, a case fatality rate of 52 percent, which is much higher than any known influenza virus, including the infamous 1918 H1N1 pandemic strain.

Mink farms in Europe and the United States have spawned five deadly COVID-19 variants (Cluster 5 in Denmark and Netherland, Marseille-4 in France, N501T in Michigan,

Y453F in Poland, and unreported mutations in Latvia). These are the only confirmed cases of spillover of COVID-19 variants from animals to people. Unless we shut down mink farms, other variants will almost certainly emerge and threaten human health and the global economy.

A massive worldwide SARS-CoV-2 epidemic in farmed mink has paralleled the human COVID-19 pandemic starting in 2020, with outbreaks on at least 450 mink farms in 13 countries in Europe, Canada, and the United States.

Only humans and mink contract the virus in large numbers and are able to spill it back to other species — with more than 21 million captive mink (includes culling) and more than seven million people perishing directly as a result of the pandemic.

The COVID-19 outbreaks at a third of U.S. mink farms are certainly undercounted because of reckless and deficient U.S. government oversight, including a months-long failure by the CDC to report transmission of a new mink variant in Michigan to people living near a mink farm in the western part of the state.

In the 117th Congress, the House approved a ban on mink farming as an amendment to the infrastructure bill, getting the House on record against mink farming, but that provision failed to survive conference.

Comparison of MINKS Legislation: 2021 vs. 2024

The MINKS Are Superspreaders Act of 2021 and the MINKS Are Superspreaders Act of 2024 each aim to address the transportation and commerce of American mink raised in captivity for fur production. The bills have the same goals but amend different statutes and have some small variations in content, with the new measure amending the Animal Welfare Act.

1. Legal Framework

2021 Bill (Superspreaders Act): Amended the Lacey Act to enforce prohibitions on various activities related to American mink in interstate or foreign commerce.

2024 Bill (MINKS Are Superspreaders Act): Introduces provisions within the Animal Welfare Act, aiming to regulate transportation, sale, acquisition, breeding, and possession of American mink.

2. Scope of Prohibition

2021 Bill: Prohibited import, export, transport, sale, reception, acquisition, or purchase of American mink for fur production or related products.

2024 Bill: Expands the prohibition to include breeding and possession of American mink raised in captivity for fur production.

3. Buyout Provision

2021 Bill: No buyout provision.

2024 Bill: Includes a buyout provision, allowing compensation or buyback of American mink-related operations affected by the legislation.

