

October 7, 2021

Dear Premier Horgan,

We, the undersigned, are **infectious diseases specialists** in British Columbia.

We are in a pandemic era. Scientific understanding of animals, infectious diseases, and societal values have evolved. The time has come **to end the hazardous practice of breeding, confining, and intensively concentrating very large numbers of naturally wild animals on fur farms.**

On March 30, 2021, we sent an Open Letter to Health Minister Dix and Agriculture Minister Popham calling attention to the risks posed by the confinement and intensive concentration of tens of thousands of animals, such as civet cats, raccoon dogs and mink, that can transmit SARS-CoV-2, influenza, and other respiratory viruses back and forth between each other and between humans.

We requested an urgent review of the licensing and permits for the breeding and confinement of animals on mink fur farms in British Columbia. We were concerned that, despite the risks, breeding was permitted.

On July 26, 2021, after additional testing documented that SARS-CoV-2 virus was circulating for over 2 months among 25,000 animals on a mink fur farm in the Fraser Valley, the Provincial Health Officer issued an order that temporarily banned breeding more mink until January 2022. Breeding season occurs in the spring, and is not directly affected by this Order. However, the Order makes a clear statement that "**mink farming is a health hazard as it is an activity which endangers or is likely to endanger public health**".ⁱ

Fur farming in BC is a situation that involves many areas of government.

As well as health risks related to infectious diseases (highlighted by us in March 2021, by the joint UN risk assessment in January 2021ⁱⁱ, by Dr. Scott Weese, a veterinary infectious disease specialist and Canada Research Chair in zoonotic diseases, and by the Provincial Health Officer), the BC SPCA, and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs have been vocal in their opposition to fur farming and have called for an end to this practice in BC. Public opinion polls have also documented that the vast majority of BC residents oppose the practice of fur farming.

It is in this context that we are writing to call for an end this practice in BC.

ⁱ <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-order-mink-farms.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-fur-farming-risk-assessment-2021.1>

This is a time sensitive matter. This past month there were still approximately 4,000 new cases of COVID-19 among people in BC per week. The ongoing presence of large mink fur farms in the province risk development of animal reservoirs and novel variants that threaten to undermine our COVID-19 vaccination program and public health efforts.

We are aware that according to standard practices, approximately 80% of minks are expected to be killed in November-December 2021, and that, if breeding is permitted in 2022, the remaining minks will be subject to breeding in the following months; each female giving birth to an average of 5 babies, and dramatically increasing the number of mink in BC.

The ban on breeding included in the July 26 Provincial Health Officer Order ends on 31, January 2022. We need to have a positive and proactive plan for our province going forward.

It is our professional opinion that the breeding ban should be made permanent, that the legislation allowing mink fur farming should be amended, and that the 10 remaining mink breeding operations in BC should be well supported to safely and completely close by the end of this year.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sara Belga

Dr. Bill Bowie

Dr. Michael Chapman

Dr. William Connors

Dr. Gregory Deans

Dr. Joshua Douglas

Dr. Dwight Ferris

Dr. David Goldfarb

Dr. Jan Hajek

Dr. David Harris

Dr. Andrew Hurlburt

Dr. Richard Lester

Dr. Victor Leung

Dr. Mary Kestler

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Dr. Luke McLaughlin
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Dr. Val Monetessori
Dr. Srinivas Murthy
Dr. Katherine Plewes
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