 

**Health Protection Scotland Briefing Note**

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| **Event** | COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus) - Update Denmark travel – new information highlighted |
| **Alert reference number** | 2020/21 |
| **Recipients of this alert** | CsPHM  HPTs  SMVN  NCTC – National Contact Tracing Centre  Scottish Government  NHS24  SAS IPC team  SAS operational managers  ICM  ID Physicians HPS Consultants HPS on Call  PHS Media Relations team |
| **Alert status** | 4. for action - monitoring, wider dissemination and specific measures to be taken by recipient |
| **Action required of initial recipients** | Cascade to others for action: HPT to communicate the information in this briefing note within their NHS Board, **including with Emergency Departments, acute medical services and primary care**. |
| **Date of issue** | 14th November 2020 |
| **Source of event information** | Scottish Government  Public Health England |
| **Contact** | **Office hours**:  PHS/HPS Incident room 0141 300 1414  PHS/HPS coronavirus mailbox ([phs.hpscoronavirus@phs.scot](mailto:phs.hpscoronavirus@phs.scot))  **Out of hours**:  HPS on call – 0141 211 3600  **GPs seeking further advice or information should contact their local HPT in the first instance** |
| **Authorised by** | Jim McMenamin |
| **HPZone context** | COVID-19 Denmark travel |

# Situation

**This updated briefing note provides information on important developments:**

SARS-CoV-2 is known to cause clinical disease in various domestic and wild animals, in particular, mink. Wide scale outbreaks have been reported in farms where they are raised for their fur in the Netherlands, Spain, the United States, Sweden, Italy and Denmark. The UK has not had mink breeding farms since the early 2000s. However, there are small numbers of mink in the UK. These are considered feral and usually avoid any contact with people.

*Mink-variant SARS-CoV-2 virus in Denmark*

Five clusters, comprising 214 people, of different mink-variant SARS-CoV-2 viruses have been identified in Denmark, primarily in the North Jutland region. On 4 October 2020, Danish authorities reported that sequencing of SARS-CoV-2 isolates from affected mink farms had identified seven unique mutations within these mink-variant viruses. The virus variant with four changes in the spike protein in cluster 5, has been found on five mink farms and in 12 humans in the surrounding community. Four of these infected individuals had direct contact to the mink farms. All 12 cases to date were reported in August and September 2020 in individuals from North Jutland (11 cases) and Zealand (1 case). Based on initial investigations, virus from this cluster demonstrated less sensitivity for neutralising antibodies when tested against antibodies collected from people with previous SARS-CoV-2 infection.

The Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has raised concerns that the emergence of mink-specific mutations may influence the virus’ sensitivity to protective antibodies after an infection with a non-mink variant of SARS-CoV-2 and affect the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines targeted at the spike protein. However, once any vaccine is introduced, we will continually monitor its effectiveness of the programme to assess whether or not any changes in the virus are impacting protection from the vaccine. If a virus was to emerge in the human population that did not appear to be well neutralised by the antibodies produced by the vaccine, then we would look to modify the proteins used in the vaccines. This approach would be in line with what we already do for flu.

*Public health responses in Denmark*

This mink-variant virus has only been reported from Denmark and authorities have initiated a cull of all 17 million mink in Denmark and imposed travel restrictions to and from North Jutland. Wide-ranging sequencing of positive tests is being initiated across the country, and targeted tracking and tracing efforts will be made to identify and curb the virus mutation in the rest of Denmark.

# Situation in Scotland

Denmark was removed from the UK travel corridor list on Friday 6th November (in Scotland this was effective from 12.30 pm). Sectoral exemptions under The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) regulations 2020 have also been removed for Denmark, effective 4am on 7th November. Therefore, all travellers returning to the UK having been or passed through Denmark in the preceding 14 days are now be required to self-isolate for 14 days from the day they were last present in a non-exempt country. They should use private transport where possible to get to their place of self-isolation, following the current physical distancing and hand washing advice. The self-isolation for 14 days also relates to their household contacts.

Arrangements are in place for these returning travellers to undertake a COVID-19 PCR test as soon as possible (day 0, being the date for first sample when the sampling kit arrives) and then on day 8 following their arrival in the UK (day 1 being the first day back in the UK). They should also undertake a COVID-19 test should symptoms develop. Public Health Scotland is providing further information separately to local Health Protection Teams on who to test and how day 0 and day 8 tests will be arranged, as they arise.

There are currently two people in Scotland who have tested positive for COVID-19 with links to Denmark in their previous 14 days to their return to the UK. In one case, whole genome sequencing (WGS) has confirmed that the infective strain is not one of the Danish mink associated variants. WGS results are awaited on the other sample.

# Situation in the rest of the UK

A 4 nations approach is being taken across the UK.

# Recommendations

### Advice for the General Public

For information on COVID-19, the public should be directed to [NHS Inform](https://www.nhsinform.scot/campaigns/wuhan-novel-coronavirus) or if online access is not available to call the NHS24 dedicated Coronavirus Helpline on 0800 028 2816. Please note that updated information will be provided to NHS Inform and uploaded to the website as quickly as possible.

## In line with current restrictions in Scotland, only essential travel should be undertaken.

**Actions for travellers returning from affected areas - Denmark**

As of 12.30pm 6th November, self-isolation is required for 14 days for all returnees from Denmark in the previous 14 days from their return to the UK. As of 4am on 7th November, self-isolation also applies to returnees’ households and to individuals previously exempted (sectoral/occupational exemptions).

Testing those who have returned to the UK from Denmark from 6th November onwards on day 0 and day 8 following their arrival in the UK, even if asymptomatic is being arranged by PHS via local HPTs.

Individuals who need medical attention for any reason should make it clear to those treating them that they have travelled from Denmark recently. This information has been communicated to some travellers through NCTC scripts.

**Actions for anyone who has been in contact with a confirmed case**

As per usual COVID-19 guidance – self-isolation for 14 days, seeking a test if symptoms arise.

Should a COVID positive case arise in a returning traveller with a history of Denmark travel, their household contacts will require testing as well as self-isolation. HPTs are advised to contact PHS for this.

***Clinical and Laboratory Guidance***

*Information for health professionals*

* Any individual with a travel history from Denmark in the preceding 14 days who requires emergency assessment or admission to hospital should be managed in strict isolation in a single room with en-suite bathroom facilities. PCR testing for COVID for travellers admitted to hospital should be arranged on admission in the usual manner and repeated every 5 days while in hospital, using current PCR assays. If the patient tests positive, an assessment should be made whether transfer to a specialised infectious diseases centre is indicated for further management. This will mainly be informed by clinical considerations.
* Standard COVID-19 personal protective equipment (PPE) should be worn and usual COVID infection and prevention control implemented. This also applies to patient transfers.
* If an individual who has returned from Denmark is identified with COVID-19 in the community **within the first 7 days from onset of symptoms (or positive PCR result if asymptomatic)**, they require to be admitted to hospital as agreed by the 4 CMOs across the UK.
* If community diagnosis of COVID is made on day 8 onwards of symptoms (or of positive result, if asymptomatic), a risk assessment should be undertaken prior to admission to hospital taking account of:
  + Clinical assessment – are they well or improving
  + Ability to comply with self-isolation at home (e.g. their current premises)
* Therefore, cases identified from day 8 of symptoms onward can be managed in the community unless admission is required for clinical or isolation compliance reasons.
* Cases who require inpatient care should be admitted to a single room with en-suite facilities preferably within an infectious disease unit, depending on the local situation. Negative pressure accommodation is not required, unless aerosol generating procedures are being undertaken.
* Individuals should not be seeking routine outpatient, ambulatory or primary care, elective treatment while in their 14 days of isolation after return from Denmark. Primary and secondary care organisations are advised that if an individual has returned from Denmark, elective and non-urgent treatment should be delayed until after their 14 days of isolation.

**Contact tracing**

* NCTC have been advised that any case with a Denmark travel history in the previous 14 days should be managed as a complex situation and escalated to the NCTC team lead and potentially to the HPT. HPTs should be aware that cases with a Denmark travel history may therefore be referred to them.
* Individuals who have returned to Scotland from 6th November having been in Denmark in the preceding 14 days, have been contacted to advise them to self-isolate along with their household. This has been undertaken by the NCTC, and PHS have supported the development of relevant scripts.

**Information for HPTs, including Testing arrangements**

* HPTs should be aware that cases with a Denmark travel history will be escalated to them by NCTC.
* HPTs may also receive calls arising from the work to contact individuals described above, and prospectively to support isolation and testing of returning travellers who have been in Denmark.
* Plans for testing of individuals who have travelled to Denmark in the 14 days prior to return to Scotland from 6th November onwards are now in place through local Health Protection Teams, as supported by PHS.
* For individuals continuing to return to the UK, PHS will continue to extract data from the travel database and share with HPT. Testing will need to continue to be arranged.
* It is possible that people may arrive in Scotland having been in Denmark in the preceding 14 days but having not completed the Passenger Locator Form (PLF). Please contact Public Health Scotland at [phs.hpscoronavirus@phs.scot](mailto:phs.hpscoronavirus@phs.scot) if any such individuals come to your attention so that testing can be arranged within 14 days of return.
* Please also inform PHS if you are informed of positive COVID cases with a travel history to Denmark who have not been notified to you by PHS, through [phs.hpscoronavirus@phs.scot](mailto:phs.hpscoronavirus@phs.scot) during normal working hours, followed up by a phone call through usual out of hours procedure, if required.

## Reporting of results

* Health Protection Teams will need to communicate results to the Denmark returning traveller. These are being processed by the Edinburgh laboratory and will be available on ECOSS.
* Tests undertaken in the usual manner via UKGov testing will follow the usual process.

## Advice for travellers

## In line with current restrictions in Scotland, only essential travel should be undertaken.

## Anyone with COVID symptoms (new persistent cough, fever, altered or absent sense of taste or smell) returning from Denmark within the previous 14 days must self-isolate along with their household members and seek a test in the usual manner.

# Context

NHS Inform Coronavirus (COVID-19) -   
<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/infections-and-poisoning/coronavirus-covid-19>

HPS Coronavirus (COVID-19) -   
<https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/a-to-z-of-topics/covid-19/>

Scottish Government Coronavirus in Scotland -   
<https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Scottish Government Ban on entry introduced for visitors from Denmark - <https://www.gov.scot/news/ban-on-entry-introduced-for-visitors-from-denmark/>

ECDC page on Novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV): <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/novel-coronavirus-china>

WHO page on Coronavirus (including the 2019-nCoV outbreak): <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>