

Health Protection Scotland Briefing Note

Event	COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus) - Update Denmark travel
Alert reference number	2020/22
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 HPS OOH1 and OOH2 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	28 th 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.hpscovid@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 (3rd) provides information on important developments:

- Lifting of additional travel restrictions from Denmark
- Denmark will remain outside the UK travel corridors
- Lifting of additional public health and healthcare measures for travellers returning from Denmark to the UK
- Genome sequencing of the virus will continue to be required for all positive samples from cases with a travel history that includes Denmark in the 14 days prior to COVID-19 diagnosis.

Background

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.

Updated situation in Scotland

Denmark was removed from the UK travel corridor list on Friday 6th November (in Scotland this was Page 2 of 6)
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effective from 12.30 pm). Sectoral exemptions under The Health Protection (Coronavirus) (International Travel) (Scotland) regulations 2020 were removed for Denmark, effective 4am on 7th November. Therefore, **until now** all travellers returning to the UK having been or passed through Denmark in the preceding 14 days **were** required to self-isolate **along with their household** for 14 days from the day they were last present in a non-exempt country. **Active surveillance for the monk variant had also been setup for travellers returning from Denmark.**

Following a period of further risk assessment and management through a 4-nations IMT led by PHE, it has been agreed that additional restrictions on travel from Denmark will end **for arrivals from 04:00 on Saturday 28 November**. Household members will not be required to isolate and travellers may be eligible for sectoral exemptions where those apply. Otherwise, arrivals from Denmark will need to complete a self-isolation period of 14 days

For further details of self-isolation requirements for travellers arriving from non-exempt countries, see <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-public-health-checks-at-borders/pages/overview/>.

In addition, the following advice applies from the date and time of issue of this briefing note:

1. NCTC will **stop** calling all Denmark arrivals with instructions to isolate for 14 days from date of arrival in the UK. Arrivals from Denmark should be managed in the same way as arrivals from other non-exempt countries and included in the sample of returned travellers called by NCTC for isolation assurance
2. PHS/NCTC/Board HPTs **will stop** sending home testing kits to all new arrivals from Denmark.
3. PHS **will continue** to send out reports of results to each HPT for samples submitted by individuals who have already received kits.
4. PHS **will no longer inform** HPTs of any new travellers arriving from Denmark.
5. HPT daily isolation assurance and support calls are **no longer required for any new** PCR-positive cases with history of recent travel to Denmark.
6. For **existing** PCR-positive cases with recent travel to Denmark already under follow-up, HPTs are asked to **continue** the daily isolation assurance and support calls until their isolation period has been completed.
7. Contacts of a **new** PCR-positive case with recent travel to Denmark **do not need specific follow-up** by HPTs, *unless* the PCR-positive traveller case is known to be infected with cluster 5 virus or another mink variant of concern.
8. The Specialist Clinical Network **will stop** discussing PCR-positive cases with a history of travel to Denmark, as they no longer need to be offered admission to hospital for isolation.
9. The policy of in-hospital isolation for any cluster 5 variant cases that are identified **is to remain in place**; admission will require coordination by PHS, the relevant HPT, and, if required, the specialist clinical network.
10. Individuals with recent history of travel to Denmark who require hospital admission for non-COVID reasons should be managed under usual clinical pathways. No additional testing or isolation precautions are required.
11. Any future cases of infection with any other mink variants of concern (other than cluster 5) will require specialist discussion; this will be facilitated by PHE national team and the specialist clinical network.
12. HPT and PHS **should continue** to obtain positive samples for 'urgent' genome sequencing from diagnostic laboratories that identify new PCR-positive cases with a history of recent travel to Denmark.
13. For any individual PCR-positive case with recent travel to Denmark, there will need to be consideration of whether further samples need to be obtained from the case, depending on availability and suitability of the original diagnostic sample for that case.
14. For **new** PCR-positive cases with recent travel to Denmark, HPTs **do not** need to inform the individual of the outcome of efforts to sequence the virus **unless** a cluster 5 variant is detected (this would trigger a specific response including hospitalisation – see point 7).

Situation in the rest of the UK

A 4 nations approach is being taken across the UK and a PHE-led national IMT has been meeting frequently but has now stood down.

No cluster 5 mink variant strains of SARS-CoV-2 have so far been identified in the UK.

Recommendations

Advice for the General Public

- For information on COVID-19, the public should be directed to NHS Inform or, if online access is not available to call the NHS24 dedicated Coronavirus Helpline on 0800 028 2816.
- In line with current restrictions in Scotland, only essential travel should be undertaken.
- Anyone with COVID-19 symptoms (new persistent cough; fever; loss of, or change in usual sense of taste or smell) must self-isolate along with their household members and seek a test in the usual manner.

Actions for travellers returning from affected areas - Denmark

As of 12.30pm 6th November, self-isolation is required for 14 days for all returning travellers who have been in Denmark within the 14 days prior to their return to the UK.

Information for HPTs, including Testing arrangements

HPTs should be aware that PCR-positive cases with a Denmark travel history will be escalated to them by NCTC to ensure the PCR sample can be directed for genome sequencing.

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 to ensure isolates are made available for genome sequencing.

Anyone who is identified as a contact of a Denmark-linked PCR-positive case of COVID-19 should follow usual COVID-19 guidance for contacts of case – self-isolation for 14 days, seeking a test if COVID symptoms arise.

Clinical and Laboratory Guidance

HPT, PHS and laboratories should continue to work together to ensure that positive samples from cases who have a travel history that includes Denmark within the 14 days prior to onset are retained for genome sequencing to exclude presence of the cluster 5 variant or any other mink variant that may be deemed of public health interest.

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>