

Discovery of goat virus gives hope for cure of rheumatoid arthritis

WASHINGTON, D.C. — A newly discovered virus in goats may help scientists find out more about human rheumatoid arthritis.

Rheumatoid arthritis, the crippling disease afflicting millions of people, has long been thought — but never proven — to be caused by a virus that is gone before the symptoms appear.

Dr. D. Scott Adams, a veterinarian with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service, Pullman Wash., said a research team has identified a virus — caprine arthritis-encephalitis — responsible for a similar disease in goats. It is the only virus to date that has been proven to cause chronic arthritis in mammals.

Now that the goat virus has been identified, it is being studied as an animal model for the human ailment, Adams said. "A better

understanding of one could lead to a better understanding of the other."

According to the Arthritis Foundation, most rheumatoid arthritis first affects people in the prime of life — between the ages of 25 and 55. Sufferers with the disease have inflamed joints, and the protective cartilage and the end of joint bones are eaten away.

Adult goats infected by caprine arthritis-encephalitis can suffer from swollen, disfigured joints of arthritis, and kids or young goats suffer from encephalitis and progressive paralysis.

But few goats — only about 3 percent in the United States — ever show any signs at all of the disease. Infected goats without symptoms can transmit the disease, thus posing a major problem for the U.S. goat industry.

Sometimes called "big knee disease," caprine arthritis-encephalitis may infect more than 80 percent of the U.S. domestic dairy goat population.

The disease, which surfaced in the late 60's, was identified in 1979 as a retrovirus — one that produces a disease only after a long incubation and persists throughout the life of the host.

"Though a vaccine against caprine arthritis-encephalitis has yet to be found," Adams said, "control measures have been developed." Using procedures developed through the experiments of his research team, he was able to bring the disease under

control and prevent it from spreading.

Adams and co-researchers found that the disease is transmitted to goat kids shortly after birth — mainly through colostrum (the fluid mothers secrete for a few days after birth) and milk.

Research showed that heat can kill the virus without harming protective antibodies in the colostrum.

Separating kid goats from their mothers at birth and feeding them colostrum that has been heated for one hour at 56 degrees Celsius (133 degrees Fahrenheit) and pasteurized milk until they are weaned, Adams said, prevents further infections and can even-

tually eradicate the disease from a herd.

Contact between infected does and non-infected kids should be kept to a minimum, he said, since mothers could transmit the virus through their saliva and other secretions.

"We have no evidence at the present time that humans can be infected by the virus. However, we still recommend that goat milk be pasteurized in order to inactivate the virus," Adams said.

Adams' research team, based at Washington State University, cooperated with the rheumatoid section of the University of Washington's medical school in Seattle in discovering the virus.

USDA requires deposit on quarantine space

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Effective immediately, all importers will be required to pay deposits to reserve quarantine space at U.S. Department of Agriculture animal import centers, according to a USDA animal health official.

Previously only people who imported birds and poultry had been required to pay deposits to reserve space at USDA animal import centers, said John K. Atwell, deputy administrator of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

Atwell said deposits are needed to assure use of quarantine space once the importer has reserved it.

"Importers who reserve space and then fail to present animals for entry cost the government money in underused facilities and personnel and they're denying space to other importers," Atwell said.

Deposits will be \$130 per animal for horses and \$240 for each lot of livestock or zoo animals. The June action increases the required deposit for each lot of birds from \$40 to \$80. Payment may be by personal or business check, certified check or U.S. money order by an importer or the importer's agent.

Atwell said the deposits are credited toward the fees importers pay to cover the cost of keeping birds, poultry, livestock or zoo animals in quarantine. Deposits will be forfeited if importers fail to use the space they reserve.

USDA-operated animal import centers are located at Newburgh, N.Y.; Miami, Fla.; Honolulu, Hawaii; and at eight ports where facilities are maintained for imported birds only.

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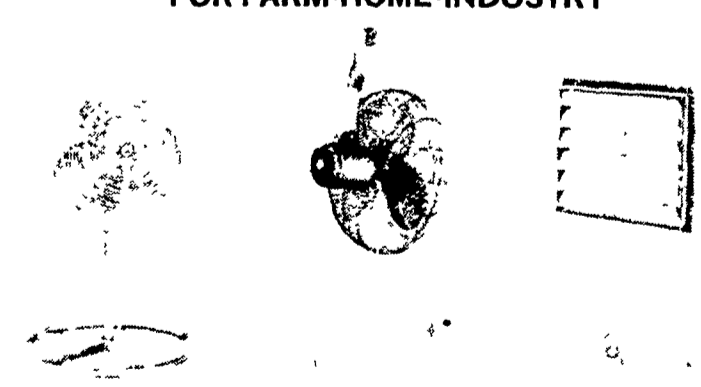
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