

State and Local

Researchers discover new virus in cats related to human AIDS

Expert: No evidence shows disease will transmit to people

By Kirsten Dietz
Senior Staff Writer

While a virus recently discovered in cats is similar to the AIDS virus in humans, there is no evidence that the disease can be transmitted to humans, says the head of small animal medicine and surgery at Texas A&M.

Dr. John August says the virus was first reported in February, although researchers have known since 1982 that a virus similar to AIDS existed. But the disease probably has been around longer than that, he says. The AIDS-like virus was discovered by Dr. Niels D. Pedersen of the University of California at Davis.

The new virus is in the same family of viruses as the feline leukemia virus, which August says was discovered about 20 years ago. A vaccine was discovered for this virus about two years ago. But, August says, while the feline leukemia virus causes an illness in cats similar to AIDS, the illness was not as similar to AIDS as this new virus.

Other animals, such as dogs, could have diseases similar to these that have not been discovered, August says.

"Cats as a species are not any more susceptible to infectious diseases than other species, but what we've done to them in the way of keeping them means we make them more prone to infectious diseases," he says.

When left alone, he says, cats tend to be solitary animals, which would make the opportunity for the transmission of diseases low.

"But we as pet owners have put cats in a lot of unusual surroundings," August says. "Infectious diseases suddenly become magnified when large numbers of cats are crowded together in a house. That's where these kinds of diseases, like the new feline AIDS virus and the

But, because the immune system is damaged, these infections can be deadly. August says the main differences in human and cat AIDS is the damage caused to the immune system, but the basic mechanisms appear to be similar.

Scientists also haven't determined

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feline leukemia virus, become more noticeable, when people have large numbers of cats that mix together very closely."

August says it isn't definitely known how widespread this virus is in cats, although surveys indicate it may be quite extensive. Also, while it hasn't been determined how important the virus is as a cause of death, he says he thinks it eventually will be an important cause of illness.

"The interesting thing about the feline AIDS virus is that it seems to damage the immune system of the infected cat in a similar fashion to the damage caused in human AIDS," August says. "Therefore, the infected cat seems to show the same clinical signs, which are usually opportunistic infections. Those are infections that normal people are able to resist from organisms — bacteria or viruses that we encounter every day."

exactly how the AIDS virus is transmitted among cats. It is known the feline leukemia virus is transferred by infected saliva, August says. He says the new virus is probably also transmitted this way, through grooming and wounds from fighting. It also might be transmitted to kittens through infected milk, he says.

However, he stresses, most cats that come in contact with infected cats probably don't get infected. Most probably develop a resistance to the virus and get rid of it, he says. Only those that are chronically infected and suffer damage to the immune system probably will die because they are susceptible to a wide variety of opportunistic infections, August says.

He says cat owners can protect their pets from the new virus by not letting them mix with strange cats or with cats that are sick with unknown

diseases. "Common-sense measures will help decrease the exposure," he says.

Cats with the new virus are being used to study human AIDS and to find a cure for the animals, he says. It's unlikely that cats will replace monkeys as models in AIDS research, but they will be an additional model, he says.

The new virus is being studied in a few places around the country, August says, but not at A&M.

Only one or two places in the United States are testing cats for the virus, he says.

The test is similar to the confirmation test for human AIDS, but is too complicated to be done at a local laboratory or veterinarian's office, he says.

"Until veterinarians can test conveniently for this particular virus and until we know its true importance, it makes sense to inform the public to its presence but not necessarily about how to control it," he says.

Right now, the feline leukemia virus is more widespread and more important, August says. In fact, most cats with AIDS-like signs really are infected with the feline leukemia virus.

"We still have a long way to go to educate the public about that," he says. "We shouldn't be distracted by the new virus — we should continue to educate the public about the feline leukemia virus. In fact, many of the things you can do to protect your cat from the feline leukemia virus are the same things you can do to protect your cat from the new virus."

Illegal alien sliced in half by train wheels

ENCINAL (AP) — A Mexican man was cut in half when a train rolled over him Wednesday while he was hiding from a Border Patrol raid, an official said.

Adolfo Olivares of Ciudad Mante, Tamaulipas, went under a parked train in this city 40 miles north of Laredo when Border Patrol agents began to check it at 5:20 a.m. Wednesday, said Oscar Martinez, Border Patrol intelligence officer in Laredo.

"What happens when the train is checked is the aliens scramble everywhere," Martinez said. "He dove underneath a piggyback car. He apparently dove right next to the wheels and at the same time, the train started moving."

"According to the report, he was cut in half."

No age was available for Olivares, who was not carrying identification, said Martinez, adding that a man traveling with Olivares provided the man's name.

The intelligence officer said five aliens have died in train incidents near Laredo in less than two weeks.

Clements signs bill cutting needed teacher appraisals

AUSTIN (AP) — A bill that would reduce the number of required performance appraisals for many Texas teachers was signed into law Wednesday by Gov. Bill Clements.

Teachers who have climbed to higher levels of the career ladder and who have been evaluated as "satisfactory" in the past would only be required to be appraised once a year.

Teachers who are on probation or who are on the first level of the career ladder would have to be appraised twice each year, according to the bill.

Clements said the bill would allow teachers "to do what they do best — teach our children."

"It benefits principals and administrators by reducing paperwork and unties the hands of our local school officials," the governor said.

The governor signed another bill on Wednesday that would authorize the videotaping of testimony of child victims of assault and sexual abuse under certain circumstances.

The old law was struck down by

the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals.

The bill also would allow courts in the state to require a person who has been indicted for sexual assault to be tested for AIDS.

AIDS, or acquired immunity deficiency syndrome, is a fatal dis-

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ease that is spread through the transfer of bodily fluids.

In all, Clements signed a total of 24 bills Wednesday, all of which were passed during the recently concluded special legislative session.

A few more of the measures — plus the 1988-89 state budget drawn up by the Legislature in a

special session — still await his signature or veto.

The governor's executive assistant, George Bayoud, said Clements should finish his review of the \$38.3 billion state budget by Thursday.

In handling that bill, the governor has authority to veto individual appropriations made by the Legislature.

Aides in Clements' office said they expected him to exercise that power.

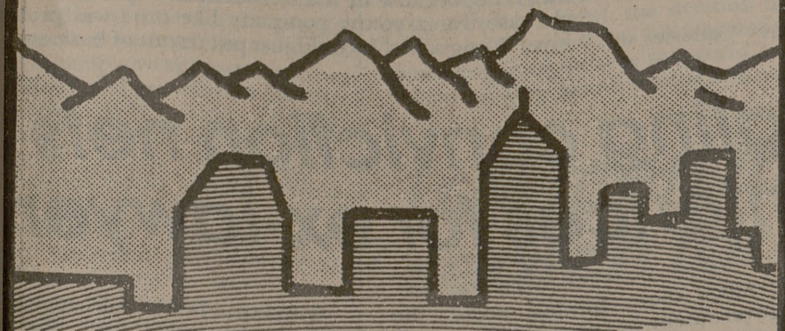
Also Wednesday, Clements signed a bill that would allow out-of-state students to pay in-state tuition rates.

The lower tuition rates would apply only to those highly qualified students who seek entrance into certain graduate programs at state universities.

Clements had vetoed the measure after the regular session, but later said that his rejection of the bill was the result of a misunderstanding.

The governor also signed into law a bill allowing some cities and counties to issue bonds to build jails.

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