

## **TB strain in veterinary nurse also affected cattle she tested, doctors reveal**

Cattle that a veterinary nurse tested for bovine TB had the same strain of bovine TB which infected her, doctors revealed today [1]. They report a case of bovine TB in a veterinary nurse aged 42, whose dog and daughter were also subsequently diagnosed with the disease. The doctors reveal that at least one of the herds tested by the nurse was infected with the same strain of bovine TB: VLA genotype 12. The authors explain: "There was a history of potential occupational exposure to *M bovis* when she worked as a veterinary nurse for two local practices in West Cornwall from 2000 to 2004" and go on to say that "this infected cattle herd does represent a potential source of infection".

Contrary to a report in September by The Times [2], the doctors do not reach "the more worrying conclusion that it was most likely the result of a chance encounter with an infected badger". Although the doctors acknowledge that infection from a badger is "possible", they offer no evidence as to how such a transmission could have taken place. David Williams, chairman of the Badger Trust, commented: "This case reveals the danger of reporting on unseen, unpublished research. The chances of badgers transmitting bovine TB to humans are vanishingly small and in this published paper the authors rightly focus on the likelihood of occupational exposure to the disease." The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) advises that "People handling infected cattle are at risk [from bovine TB], especially if they become contaminated with mucus from the respiratory tract (eg by holding the animal's nose) and then do not follow the basic rules of good personal hygiene." [3]

Mr Williams continued: "It is disappointing that some vets appear to have misled journalists in September about the conclusions of this medical paper before it had been published. Given that the penalties for failing to ensure health and safety at work are severe, it is perhaps understandable that some people might want to blame badgers for this disease rather than occupational exposure. We hope that, in future, journalists will treat such claims by vets with appropriate scepticism and wait until the research is formally published."

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For further comment, contact David Williams, Badger Trust chairman, on 0776 851 8064 or Jack Reedy, a Badger Trust Director, on 0775 173 1107.

1. Shirkrishna, D. et al (2008), Human and canine pulmonary *Mycobacterium bovis* infection in the same household: re-emergence of an old zoonotic threat? *Thorax* 2009;64:89–91. doi:10.1136/thx.2008.106302
2. Elliott, V. (2008), Woman 'given bovine TB by garden badger', *The Times*, 26 September 2008.

3. HSE (2008), Common zoonoses in agriculture, Agriculture Information Sheet No 2 (revised), Health and Safety Executive, June 2008.

Badger Trust is the only charity solely dedicated to the conservation of badgers across Great Britain.

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