

Joint research projects on improved vaccines against rabies

Friedrich-Loeffler-Institut and IDT Biologika sign collaboration agreement

Isle of Riems/Dessau, 08 April 2014. The Friedrich-Loeffler-Institut, Federal Research Institute for Animal Health (FLI), and IDT Biologika have signed a collaboration agreement for joint research on rabies vaccines. With this agreement, the two partners continue their meanwhile traditional research relationship, which began almost forty years ago with the development of oral vaccines against fox rabies. The aim for the next two years is to improve available rabies vaccines and to develop new ones. „We are pleased that this collaboration agreement enables us to continue our research cooperation intensively and to benefit from the expertise available on both sides“, says Prof. Dr. Dr. h. c. Thomas C. Mettenleiter, President of the FLI. „The cooperation offers promising perspectives for both partners. For us, the continued collaboration in the field of rabies research is a possibility to find effective solutions for the worldwide control of this infectious disease“, emphasizes IDT managing director Dr. Gert Barysch.

Most of the currently available oral rabies live vaccines go back to a single parental virus. These pathogens were attenuated sufficiently so that they do not cause symptoms of disease in the vaccinated animal but still activate the immune system efficiently. In some animal species activation of the immune system after oral administration of the currently available

rabies live vaccines is not sufficient to provide safe protection. Therefore, it is necessary to develop new vaccines which replicate more efficiently in vaccinated animals and activate their immune system to fight an infection with rabies viruses more successfully than at present. In order to improve currently available vaccines it is also intended to investigate the interactions between the pathogen and its host cells and to optimize replication of the vaccine virus. To realize these projects, IDT Biologika will provide approximately 580,000 Euro.

Rabies is one of the oldest known zoonoses, i.e. infectious diseases which can be transmitted between animals and humans, caused by a virus. According to estimations of the World Health Organization WHO more than 50,000 humans worldwide die from the disease every year, particularly in the poorer countries of Africa and Asia. Since the end of the 1970s, fox rabies could be controlled successfully in large parts of Europe by means of modified live bait vaccines. Since 2008, Germany like many other Western and Central European countries is considered to be free of classical rabies. In threshold countries and in large parts of Asia and Africa however rabies still plays an important role, particularly in stray dogs. The FLI has conducted research on rabies for decades and supports affected countries in controlling the infection. Furthermore, the FLI houses a reference laboratory of the World Organisation for Animal Health OIE for rabies and the “WHO Collaborating Centre for Rabies Surveillance and Research”.

With its vaccines for oral immunization of foxes, IDT plays a crucial role in the successful control of rabies in Germany and other European countries. Nationwide vaccinations, supported

by a fully automated and computer-based system for distribution of vaccine baits by plane (SURVIS), have largely eliminated the rabies risk. IDT is a recognized partner worldwide for research on and control of sylvatic and canine rabies. Joint research projects have produced valuable knowledge on rabies e. g. in dogs, foxes, raccoon dogs and bats, which have led to considerable progress in the control of this dangerous infectious disease worldwide.

For the new Riems affiliation of IDT the collaboration means both, an intensification of research and the potential possibility to produce new vaccines at IDT Biologika (Riems).

FLI und IDT Biologika also cooperate in developing new research approaches for the control of animal diseases and zoonoses in the frame of the research program „Infect Control 2020“ of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

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