

Study of the influenza A virus in wild boars living in a major duck wintering site



Wild birds, which are reservoirs of influenza viruses, are believed to be the original source of new influenza viruses that can be transmitted to domestic animals as well as humans and represent a potential epizootic and/or pandemic threat. Despite increasing knowledge on influenza A virus dynamics in wild birds, the viral circulation in wild boars remains largely unknown. This is of particular interest since pigs can be infected with both human and avian viruses; upon co-infection, they can act as a mixing vessel through reassortment, a mechanism that resulted in the emergence of the pandemic H1N1 virus in 2009. The Camargue (Southern France) appears as an ideal study area to investigate inter-species transmission of influenza A viruses from wild birds and possibly humans to wild boars. Indeed, the important local wild boar population shares wetland use with humans and the largest concentration of wintering ducks in France, that are both susceptible to infection by influenza A viruses. Additionally, wild boars occasionally prey on ducks. We conducted a virological and serological survey on wild boars in the Camargue between September 2009 and November 2010. No influenza A virus was detected in the collected nasal swabs and no influenza specific antibodies were observed in the serological samples. As the study was mainly focused on viral excretion, which is limited in time, we cannot exclude that low or occasional influenza A virus circulation took place during the study period.

Although, wild boars did not seem to be a key element in the dynamics of influenza A virus circulation in the Camargue, wild boar influenza A virus infections should be more widely studied to determine if the pattern observed here represents the normal situation or an exceptional one.

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Obtenir le document : Tour du Valat

Mots clés : VIRUS, OISEAU D'EAU

Date : 2012

Type de ressource : Article scientifique

Format : text/xml

Identifiant Documentaire : PRLM5788

Langue : Anglais

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