

## News Update

---

04 Mar 15

### **Biosafety Incident: Possible Release of *Burkholderia pseudomallei* from a U.S. High-Security BSL-3 Laboratory**

#### Background

On 01 Mar 15, USA TODAY (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/03/01/tulane-primate-bio-lab-bacteria-release/24137053/>) reported that the officials in Louisiana, U.S. are investigating the cause of release of *Burkholderia pseudomallei* from a high-security BSL-3 laboratory at the Tulane National Primate Research Centre (TNPRC), which was working on the development of a vaccine against the bacteria. The centre has thus been ordered to stop all research work until completion of the investigation.

#### Incidents and Preliminary Findings

Two monkeys kept separately in enclosures that are among dozens of large outdoor field cages within the research centre compound (South Campus) fell ill in November 2014 and were sent to the primate centre's veterinary hospital, about 5 minutes' drive away (North Campus). Laboratory tests by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identified the bacterial strain affecting the two monkeys as identical to the *B. pseudomallei* strain (Strain 1026b) used by Tulane BSL-3 laboratory. Both infected animals were euthanised on 26 Nov 14 and 19 Feb 15, respectively.

Two other healthy monkeys which were kept in outdoor field cage were subsequently tested positive for antibodies against *B. pseudomallei* on 25 Feb 15. The only correlation between these two animals and the two euthanised animals was that they had been in the centre's veterinary hospital around the same time; leading to the suspicion that the hospital may have caused the animals to be exposed to the bacteria.

A federal investigator who was assisting with the investigation also became ill within 24 hours after visiting the facility on 20-24 Jan 15. Her blood test on 06 Feb 15 was positive for antibodies against the bacteria but she had since recovered. CDC could not rule out the possibility that the investigator could have been exposed to the bacteria during her past international travel to regions endemic with the bacteria.

Further investigation on the environmental samples (soil and water) collected from the facility ground did not detect the presence of the bacteria. There was however, argument that the sample size was too small for a conclusive finding. Samples were also collected from surfaces and equipment of the veterinary hospital, but none yield positive result as the site had been decontaminated before it became a prime suspect.

Investigations are still on-going to determine the origin of the source.