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Freedom of Information | Administration and support services | Imperial College London

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Freedom of Information Act request, use of pathogens in research, IMPFOI-23-260, Imperial College response

Do you hold any potential pandemic pathogens (PPPs) in any of your labs? If yes, what are they?

Imperial College conducts research with potential pandemic pathogens, as defined by the list of priority diseases published by the World Health Organisation (WHO).
We conduct research with SARS-CoV-2 and Zika viruses. SARS-CoV 2 is handled at containment level 3, Zika virus is handled at containment level 2.

Are you working with any infectious agents under a Specified Animal Pathogens Order (SAPO)? If yes, what are they? If applicable, what biosecurity level is used during work with PPPs and SAPO infectious agents?

We have a SAPO licence that allows us to conduct research with:

- Vesicular Stomatitis virus- delta G strains only. This strain is used as a model for the development of vaccines. The strain is handled at containment level 3.
- PRV-Bartha, which is an attenuated strain of the pseudorabies virus (Aujeszky's disease virus). The research with this virus is conducted at CL2.
- Lab strains of Tripanosoma Brucei Brucei, the work is conducted at containment level 2
- Tripanosoma equiperdum; work is conducted at containment level 2
- Trichinella spiralis, work is conducted at containment level 2.

In accordance with biosafety regulations, all class 2 and above projects are submitted to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) for further and independent scrutiny. We adhere strictly to the approved list of biological agents (ACDP), Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) and Control of Substances hazardous to health (COSHH) regulations. The HSE regularly conducts inspections of our Containment level 3 facilities.

Are you currently carrying out any gain of function work, or experiments to enhance the infectiousness of transmissibility of PPPs or SAPO infectious agents?

No, we do not conduct research that aims to enhance the infectiousness or transmissibility of biological agents. While unlikely, we have robust safety protocols in place to ensure we are in a position to identify and deal with any unexpected gain of function, including immediately inactivating the biological agent in question should this be indicated, conducting a full investigation, and permanently ceasing all work with it should hazardous gain of function be confirmed.

Have you had any incidents of biosecurity lapses, leaks or safety breaches in the past five years? If so, can you list these?

There been no biosecurity lapses, leaks or safety breaches involving PPPs or SAPO infectious agents.