Bats and Rodents Carry Viruses Resembling Hepatitis C

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Two new studies have found that both rodents and bats carry viruses known as hepaciviruses and pegiviruses that are close relatives of the hepatitis C virus (HCV). These discoveries may aid in the development of a hep C vaccine and in research to gain better understanding about how the virus may have leapt from animals to humans.

In a paper published in the journal mBio, investigators tested more than 400 rodents caught in the wild, finding evidence of both hepaciviruses and pegiviruses, as well as one animal that was infected with multiple hepaciviruses. Similar coinfections occur with hep C in humans, which implies that the immune system's response to the virus differs from its reaction to most other viruses. This discovery may also help in developing vaccines, as well as in creating models of human disease in animals to aid in other research about the virus.

A second study, published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS), identified 83 novel hepaciviruses and pegiviruses in 1,615 bats collected from around the world, for an infection rate of 5 percent. These findings may indicate that the bat population has long harbored both viruses; further research may help researchers better understand the evolution of hep C in humans.

To read a release on the studies, click here.

To read the mBio study, click here.

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http://beta.docker.hepmag.com/article/hepaciviruses-pregiviruses-23845-358694445