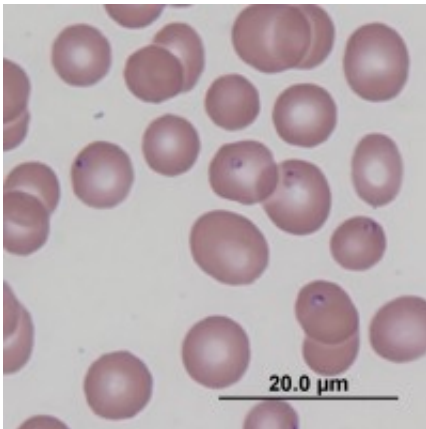


# Potentially deadly new infection found in Australia

March 19 2012

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(Medical Xpress) -- Murdoch University researchers have helped to identify a new human infection in Australia after the disease contributed to the death of a Canberra man.

Associate Professor Peter Irwin and Dr Andrea Paparini from the School of Veterinary and [Biomedical Sciences](#) were able to confirm the presence of the [disease](#) in [blood samples](#) taken from the man.

“The disease, known as babesiosis, is caused by a tick-transmitted zoonotic protozoan parasite,” Dr Irwin said.

“This [infection](#) is well known in the northern hemisphere where it causes

serious illness in people, but this is the first time it has been identified in Australia.”

“It is essentially an animal parasite that usually infects rats and mice.

“People are infected accidentally when they are bitten by an infected tick, and it has also been reported to have been transmitted in blood transfusions overseas.

“What is really interesting about this discovery is that we don’t know how the man was infected and it raises interesting questions about the possibility that this form of babesiosis exists in our native animals or introduced rodents.”

Dr Sanjaya Senanayake from Canberra Hospital and Australian National University suspected the presence of babesiosis in the patient. Dr Senanayake led the research team which also included the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta USA.

“It was initially thought that the patient was suffering from malaria, but he did not respond to treatment,” Dr Irwin said.

“Because of our expertise in this area with animals, we were asked to take a look at the parasite and confirmed that it wasn’t malaria, it was babesiosis.”

People suffering from babesiosis suffer from anaemia and low platelet counts which can present in the form of fatigue and headaches.

The results of the research have been published in the *Medical Journal of [Australia](#)*. Dr Peter Irwin has been researching babesiosis since the 1980s.

**More information:** [www.mja.com.au/](http://www.mja.com.au/)

Provided by Murdoch University

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