

# Researchers to look for bovine influenza antibodies in humans

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An emerging virus discovered in pigs and later in cows may have affected people without them even knowing it, according to South Dakota State University research assistant professor Natalie Thiex of the biology and microbiology department.

Thiex, an epidemiologist, and senior Alyssa Petersen, a psychology and premed major, will conduct a survey to determine if people have developed antibodies for bovine influenza through a one-year \$6,970 grant from the SDSU Research and Scholarship Committee. Professor Feng Li, a virologist, and associate professor Russ Daly, SDSU Extension veterinarian, are also involved.

This summer the researchers hope to survey 300 people living on farms and in cities within a 50- to 100-mile radius of Brookings. Participants will fill out a questionnaire about their health history, exposure to livestock, and basic demographic data and then give a blood sample. Thiex estimates this will take about 30 minutes.

Those interested in participating can contact Thiex at 605-688-5874 or [natalie.thiex@sdstate.edu](mailto:natalie.thiex@sdstate.edu) to volunteer.

Thiex learned about bovine influenza through a presentation Li gave on campus. He and other veterinary science researchers are part of the team of scientists that identified and sequenced the genome of the [virus](#), which has 50 percent similarity to the human influenza C virus that typically causes very mild respiratory symptoms in people. The virus was

originally identified and characterized by Ben Hause, now an assistant research professor at Kansas State University, while completing his doctorate at SDSU.

Subsequently, the research team discovered bovine influenza antibodies in 1.3 percent of blood samples collected from residents in Connecticut and British Columbia during two influenza seasons from 2007 to 2009. However, no information was available about whether these people had contact with animals.

"We are hoping to find volunteers to be a part of this study so we can gather baseline data about this emerging virus. Characterizing the prevalence and pathogenicity of new influenza viruses is a public health priority," Thiex said.

She and Petersen also plan to recruit participants by attending events, such as regional dairy and veterinary meetings and Dakotafest.

Provided by South Dakota State University

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