

# Exotic squirrels transmit deadly virus to breeders in Germany

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(HealthDay)—After the mysterious deaths of three German variegated squirrel breeders, researchers have identified a deadly new virus that can be transmitted from variegated squirrels to humans. Details of the findings were published in the July 9 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

The three [squirrel](#) breeders were diagnosed with encephalitis and died within two to four months of developing symptoms. The three deaths occurred between 2011 and 2013. Analysis of the squirrels and the victims' brains found that this previously undetected [virus](#) was present in both the animals and the humans. The study's senior author, Martin Beer, D.V.M., head of virus diagnostics at the Friedrich-Loeffler Institute in

Insel Riems, Germany, told *HealthDay* that the three men were in their 60s or older and had other [medical conditions](#) that possibly could have contributed to their reaction to the virus.

The three men were friends, and all were members of the same squirrel-breeding association, the researchers said. And, at least two of them were known to have been scratched by their squirrels, and one had been bitten.

Analyses showed that this virus, named variegated squirrel 1 bornavirus (VSBV-1), is separate from the other known bornavirus species, Beer said. "However, there is, up to now, no indication that other squirrel species can also be infected, and there are no further human cases reported," he added.

**More information:** [Full Text \(subscription or payment may be required\)](#)

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