

Pigs could accelerate coronavirus vaccine development

The Pirbright Institute is joining in the global battle to help control COVID-19 by using its unique expertise and facilities to support the development of vaccines to protect against severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2, the cause of the current pandemic.

Working in collaboration with researchers at the University of Oxford and Public Health England, a team of scientists at Pirbright will begin testing new vaccines for their ability to induce protective antibodies against SARS-CoV-2.

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The vaccine candidates developed at Oxford will contain the spike protein from SARS-CoV-2, the protein against which protective antibodies are generated in infected patients. Pirbright scientists will measure the level of antibodies produced after vaccination of pigs and assess whether the antibodies can block SARS-CoV-2 from infecting cells, thereby preventing infection.

Importantly, the pig immune system shares significant similarities to that of humans, so a good response to a vaccine in pigs will help to predict the success of vaccines for human use. Researchers will also test the safety of the new vaccines and monitor whether any adverse effects are observed in the pigs.

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