
New VLA virology facility to benefit exotic disease research

The Veterinary Laboratories Agency has officially opened its new high containment virus research facility.

With state-of-the-art technologies and an innovative modular design for secure biocontainment, the laboratory will be the hub of a diverse range of research activities.

Viral diseases, such as influenza and rabies, which continue to be a threat to man, livestock, companion animals and wildlife will be studied and particularly those whose importance has escalated through climate change.

The laboratory has specialist facilities to maintain insect colonies so VLA scientists can study their potential to act as vectors. This will support research on diseases transmitted by insect vectors which are seen as an increased risk especially due to climate change. Examples include West Nile fever virus, Japanese encephalitis virus and tick-borne encephalitis.

The building will also house VLA's virus repository for avian influenza, Newcastle disease, rabies and other exotic viruses as well as providing an enhanced capability for maintaining virus archives supported by the European Virus Archive (EVA) project.

At the official opening, Peter Borriello, VLA's Chief Executive, said:

“This new facility will enable VLA to continue to maintain a cost efficient, high profile strategic programme of work for animal and human health, benefiting the public, farmers and the government. The laboratory will provide valuable support to our unique specialist service in research, surveillance and emergency response to disease outbreaks.”

The new facility will also underpin VLA's essential reference laboratory activities. It will provide further opportunities for developing its academic partnerships with UK universities as well as leading a number research projects with international networks such as CIDLID, ArboZooNet, FluTrain and Offlu.

The building has been awarded a 'very good' rating using the Building Research Establishment Assessment Method (BREEAM). It has numerous sustainable and renewable energy features including solar thermal devices, propane chillers and enhanced insulation materials.

The assessors also recognised the waste minimisation and recycling measures followed during the construction phase. These included the recycling of timber, cardboard and metal as well as the monitoring of power.

Notes for editors

VLA delivers world-class veterinary research and surveillance for the government and animal health industry to safeguard public and animal health. It is an executive

agency of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) with a regional network of 16 veterinary laboratories and a central research facility near Weybridge in Surrey.

One of VLA's key functions is the surveillance, detection and control of exotic, zoonotic and emerging diseases in farmed animals. Other services include animal health related research, specialised testing, epidemiology and risk assessment to support policy-making. It also maintains an emergency response capability to ensure protection from disease outbreaks.

VLA is a national and international reference laboratory for many diseases including avian influenza, rabies, bovine tuberculosis, classical swine fever and TSEs. It is also responsible for the surveillance and research activities of many arboviruses (arthropod-borne viruses); both endemic and exotic. The Agency works in partnership with universities and institutes across the world in providing expert advice and consultancy. www.vla.gov.uk

For further information on the international networks and projects, see the following websites:

CIDLID

<http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Publications/100215-cidlid-brochure.pdf>

ArboZooNet

http://www.arbo-zoo.net/events-projects_4/index.html

FluTRAIN

http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp7/pdf/19072010/flutrain_international_coop.pdf

Offlu

<http://www.offlu.net/>

European Virus Archive

<http://www.european-virus-archive.com/>