From: **UNC Media Relations** mediarelations@unc.edu
Subject: Re: Urgent Media question on COVID-19 biosafety incident at UNC and FOIA request on behalf of Independent Science News
Date: August 12, 2020 at 5:40 PM
To: Jonathan Latham jrlatham@bioscienceresource.org

UR

Hello Jonathan,
Thanks for the opportunity to respond to your questions.

The April 2020 incident referred to in the University Institutional Biosafety Committee meeting minutes involved a mouse-adapted SARS-CoV-2 strain used in the development of a mouse model system critically needed for the preclinical testing of novel therapeutics for treating coronavirus disease, including COVID-19.

Mouse-adapted pathogens generally pose a lesser risk of infection in humans because the binding mechanisms for a mouse-adapted virus typically differ from those in a virus that infects humans. Mouse biology differs from human biology and a virus that has evolved to infect humans may not cause a comparable infection in a mouse – and vice versa. For that reason, mouse-adapted viral strains are often referred to as "attenuated."

The incident occurred in a secure facility where experienced, highly trained researchers wear significant personal protective equipment and operate under stringent biosafety and biosecurity procedures and practices. Therefore, the likelihood of exposure in this incident was minimal.

Nonetheless, when a reportable incident occurs, protocols are triggered. The University implemented appropriate protocols following existing CDC guidelines and sent a full report to NIH. The researcher did not develop any symptoms and no infection occurred as a result of the incident.

NIH records show the agency fully reviewed the incident reports, engaged with personnel at the University to the degree the agency deemed necessary, and signaled no additional information was needed upon conclusion.

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From: Jonathan Latham <jrlatham@bioscienceresource.org>
Sent: Tuesday, August 11, 2020 8:16 AM
To: UNC Media Relations <mediarelations@unc.edu>
Subject: Urgent Media question on COVID-19 biosafety incident at UNC and FOIA request on behalf of Independent Science News

Dear UNC Media Relations

Chapel Hill Biosafety Officer Garry Coulson has directed my question to you:

I am a science writer and virologist who has been provided with a FOIA-requested set of UNC IBC minutes.
These minutes include a 2020 meeting dated May 6th which asserts that an unspecified UNC Chapel Hill virology lab had a reportable incident in which a mouse bite was received by a researcher working on “recombinant SARS-CoV-2” (see attached pdf page 109).
Could you please answer the following questions for us:
1) What was the value or purpose of the specific experiment that was being conducted when the incident occurred?
2) Did the bitten researcher develop a coronavirus infection?
3) Did the bitten researcher show any symptoms?
4) Were they quarantined or were any other precautions taken to prevent interpersonal spread?
5) What was the nature of the recombinant virus?
6) Can you please confirm that the bitten researcher survived?
7) Whose laboratory was involved?
8) Is there anything you would like readers of *Independent Science News* to know or statement that UNC would like to make?
Can you please get back to me by Wednesday evening?

Thank you in advance.

Jonathan Latham, PhD

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Notice: Please forgive any delays and slow news. I am writing a book about genetics and genetic determinism.

It is provisionally titled: **The Myth of The Master Molecule: DNA and the Social Order**

The contention of the book is that the key organising principle of Western thought is the seemingly innocuous and seemingly simple idea that our personal qualities are biologically inherited. That is, our character derives from our ancestors rather than being an always-adapting product of our own experiences, decisions, and education. The book makes the case, first, that genetic determinism is a scientific fallacy. Organisms are self-organised systems and therefore are not genetically determined. Second, the explanation for the myth, which originated in Mesopotamia before 6,000 years ago, is its utility. Genetic determinism rationalises political systems based on genetic privilege. The result was the dismantling of ancient cultures based on inclusiveness and egalitarianiism and their transformation into rigid structures of authoritarian domination based on separation and division: into families, classes, races, nations, sexes (i.e. patriarchy), and species. The final proposition of the book is that propagating the myth was the chief aim of Zoroastrianism and all the Abrahamic religions. Since the 1850s, this role has been appropriated by science. By recognizing how the founding myth of Western civilization is being re-told in the language of science we can start to dismantle and replace it with a more humane and scientific understanding of the world.