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Introduction

In 1902 Aladár Aujeszky, from Hungary, isolated the causative virus from cattle, dogs and cats that caused so called 'pseudorabies' and differentiated it from rabies. It became known as Aujeszky's disease. Subsequently, in 1931, it was established that the so called 'mad itch' seen on American pig farms was caused by the Aujeszky's disease virus. In 1934 the virus was identified as a herpesvirus.

Of the different animals infected by this virus only the pig is able to survive infection and is regarded as the natural host. The frequency of Aujeszky's disease rose rapidly in Europe when the intensive pig industry was created and was then spread around the world by international trade in live pigs and pig products.

Different strains of the virus exist and they can cause major piglet losses or losses from abortions in the breeding herd. There is a marked age resistance against the Aujeszky's disease virus.

The virus

Aujeszky's disease virus is a herpesvirus and only one serotype is known. Man is resistant to natural infection by this virus.

The Aujeszky's disease virus has an almost global distribution, with Australia being a notable exception to this. Spread occurred in the 1970s and 1980s due to the emergence of more virulent strains of the virus and the advent of large scale confinement housing. Since then the disease has been eradicated from many European countries, Canada, the USA and New Zealand. The disease is still endemic in southeastern Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa.

Despite successful elimination from the domestic herd, this disease is still present in feral pigs and wild boars in many areas.

The Aujeszky's disease virus exists as several types. Type I is found in USA and Central Europe, types II and III in Europe, while type IV is found in Asia.

Large doses of virus are needed to infect animals so Aujeszky's disease is not very contagious. Viral spread is via direct contact between pigs or by contact with contaminated fomites. Under favourable conditions airborne transmission over a short distance is possible.

Infected swine shed this virus in virtually all their bodily secretions and via the aerosol route. Viral shedding starts 1-2 days after infection and lasts for up to 2-3 weeks. Transplacental spread leads to a heavy virus shedding during abortion or birth. Virus can also be found in ejaculate for up to two weeks after the boar was infected.

Aujeszky's disease virus is rather resistant to environmental conditions. In slurry this virus can remain infectious for up to two months.

It is susceptible to most disinfectants.