New reassortant and enzootic European swine influenza 1 viruses transmits efficiently through direct contact in the ferret model

The reverse zoonotic events that introduced the 2009 pandemic influenza virus into pigs have drastically increased the diversity of swine influenza viruses in Europe. The pandemic potential of these novel reassortments is still unclear, necessitating enhanced surveillance of European pigs with additional focus on risk assessment of these new viruses. In this study, four European swine influenza viruses were assessed for their zoonotic potential. Two of the four viruses were enzootic viruses of subtype H1N2 (with avian-like H1) and H3N2 and two were new reassortants, one with avian-like H1 and human-like N2 and one with 2009 pandemic H1 and swine-like N2. All viruses replicated to high titers in nasal wash- and nasal turbinate samples from inoculated ferrets and transmitted efficiently by direct contact. Only the H3N2 virus transmitted to naïve ferrets via the airborne route. Growth kinetics using a differentiated human bronchial epithelial cell line showed that all four viruses were able to replicate to high titers. Further, the viruses revealed preferential binding to the α2,6-sialylated glycans and investigation of the antiviral susceptibility of the viruses revealed that all were sensitive to neuraminidase inhibitors. These findings suggest that these viruses have the potential to infect humans and further underline the need for continued surveillance as well as biological characterization of new influenza A viruses.