

Most koalas in Japan carry leukemia virus: report

April 12 2009



Nearly 90 percent of koalas in Japanese zoos are infected with a virus believed to cause leukemia in the marsupials, a report said

Nearly 90 percent of koalas in Japanese zoos are infected with a virus believed to cause leukemia in the marsupials, a report said.

Researchers at the Institute for Virus Research Kyoto University and the Japanese Association of Zoos and Aquariums tested the blood of 50 of the 62 koalas kept in Japan, the Daily Yomiuri said.

The koala retrovirus -- believed to cause [leukemia](#) and [lymphoma](#) -- was

detected in all 39 northeastern koalas, and in four of 11 southern koalas, the English version of the mass-circulation Yomiuri Shimbun reported.

There are two main subspecies of wild koala -- the northeast Australian koala and the south Australian koala.

The retrovirus poses no danger to humans, but there is concern that it could lead to a dramatic decline in the number of koalas in captivity in Japan, the daily said.

While the sources of the infections were not identified, it is thought most likely they already were infected before being imported from Australia, it said.

Scientists say it is difficult to prevent koalas becoming infected with the [virus](#) as it infects the reproductive cells of the koalas and is passed down to their offspring, the daily said.

Of the 38 [koalas](#) born in Japan, 36 were found to have been infected, it added.

(c) 2009 AFP

Citation: Most koalas in Japan carry leukemia virus: report (2009, April 12) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-04-koalas-japan-leukemia-virus.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.