

Protein that blocks H1N1 strain found

RESEARCH teams from the French National Institute of Agricultural Research (INRA) and from the National Institute of Health and Medical Research (Inserm) have discovered a protein called protease-activated receptor 2 (PAR2) that could be pivotal in protecting animals in case of infection by the H1N1 virus.

Their findings have been published in the June 15 issue of *The Journal of Immunology*.

Researchers first infected mice with the H1N1 strain of the flu virus and then with a peptide that activates the PAR2 receptor. The treatment caused the mice to produce large amounts of cytokines, or hormones that neutralise the virus by preventing it from reproducing and spreading.

By producing this hormone, the mice were able to survive infection from a virus that would otherwise have been fatal.

"The advantage of this strategy, compared with the usual arsenal against flu (antiviral drugs, vaccines), is that it targets infected cells instead of the virus itself," the researchers wrote.

The treatment could be effective against all strains of the H1N1 virus and even when it is resistant to present treatments, they said.

The H1N1 virus used for this study, which was begun in 2006, is a type of virus used by international laboratories for several years. While it is fatal for mice, it does not pose any risk for humans. – AFP-Relaxnews