

Serological screening in animals combined with environmental surveys provides definite proof of the local establishment of Burkholderia pseudomallei in Guadeloupe

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1	Serological screening in animals combined with environmental surveys provides definite
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3	
4	Short title: Burkholderia pseudomallei in the French West Indies
5	
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26 Abstract

27 Background

28 Melioidosis is an emerging infectious disease caused by the soil-dwelling bacterium 29 Burkholderia pseudomallei that affects both humans and animals. It is endemic in South and 30 Southeast Asia, and northern Australia, causing an estimated 165,000 human cases annually 31 worldwide. Human cases have been reported in the French West Indies (Martinique and 32 Guadeloupe) since the 1990s. Conversely, no human cases have been reported in French 33 Guiana, a French territory in South America. Our study aimed to investigate whether B. 34 pseudomallei is locally established in Guadeloupe and French Guiana. We assessed animal 35 exposure by serology and examined the presence of *B. pseudomallei* in the environment of 36 seropositive animals.

37 Methodology/Principal findings

Blood samples were collected from domestic animals in two goat farms in Les Saintes, 38 39 Guadeloupe (n=31), and in 56 farms in French Guiana (n=670) and tested by ELISA. 40 Serological follow up was performed on selected farms. Soil, water and goat rectal swabs 41 were collected and analysed by culture and PCR. In French Guiana, the highest prevalence 42 rates were observed in equids (24%) and cattle (16%), while in Les Saintes, a prevalence of 39% was observed in goats. The longitudinal study in Les Saintes revealed consistent high 43 44 seropositivity in goats. A B. pseudomallei strain was isolated from the soil from one of the farms and detected in goat rectal swabs from the other farm. 45

46 Conclusions/Significance

Our environmental investigation prompted by the serologic data confirms the presence of *B*. *pseudomallei* in Les Saintes, consistent with documented human cases of melioidosis on this
island. In French Guiana, our serologic results call for environmental surveys and a re-

evaluation of human infections with melioidosis-like symptoms. The approach developed in
this study may help to identify high-risk areas that warrant further investigation.

52

53 Keywords: serology, veterinary science, ELISA, environment, melioidosis, *Burkholderia*54 *pseudomallei*

55

56 Author summary

Burkholderia pseudomallei, an environmental bacterium, is the causative agent of melioidosis in humans and animals. If the disease has been historically reported to be endemic in South Asia and northern Australia, recent studies reveal its presence outside of these territories, both in the environment and among patients who have not travelled to endemic areas. Furthermore, the projected increase in extreme climatic events in the near future could increase the prevalence of the disease as well as cause its emergence in new territories. For these reasons, it is important to identify new areas at risk.

Our study aimed to investigate the presence of the pathogen in French West Indies. We combined surveys in domestic animals (cattle, goats, horses, sheep, and pigs) and in the environment. The identification of seropositive animals without clinical signs, together with the isolation of *B. pseudomallei* in the environment of a goat farm in Guadeloupe, underscores the importance of including melioidosis in animal surveillance programs. The use of serologic methods can help identify animal exposure to the pathogen, thereby helping to identify areas where the pathogen may be present in the environment.

71 Introduction

Melioidosis is an opportunistic infectious disease with a significant prevalence in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and northern Australia, primarily due to environmental exposure to *Burkholderia (B.) pseudomallei*. This telluric bacterium can affect both humans and animals through inhalation, ingestion, or skin contact [1]. It is listed as a Class 1 pathogen by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and as a selected agent under the Microorganisms and Toxins (MOT) regulations by the French National Agency for the Safety of Medicines and Health Products (ANSM).

The global melioidosis burden was predicted to be 165,000 human cases in 2015 (2). Moreover,
reports of human and, occasionally, animal cases are increasing along with environmental
evidence of the bacteria worldwide, highlighting the probable presence of the bacterium in all
continents, including Africa and the Americas [3–5].

83 The clinical presentation of the disease is highly variable between individuals and species, ranging from chronic forms to acute septicaemia [1,6]. Diagnosis and treatment of human 84 85 melioidosis are complicated by the lack of pathognomonic clinical features and a long treatment duration. Several risk factors, such as diabetes, and chronic diseases, contribute to 86 increased susceptibility [7]. In animals, melioidosis affects a variety of species with multiple 87 88 cases documented in domestic animals such as cats, cattle, deer, dogs, goats, equids, sheep, and sporadic cases in other species, including marine mammals, birds and even crocodiles in zoos 89 90 or wildlife parks [6].

91 Human melioidosis is a neglected disease and, as such, lacks accurate epidemiological data and 92 diagnostic tools. These are even more limited for animal melioidosis, and the diagnostic 93 approaches for animal melioidosis are generally the same as those in humans [6,8,9]. Although 94 diagnostic methods such as indirect hemagglutination (IHA), complement fixation test (CFT) 95 and enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) have been developed for commonly tested 96 species such as small ruminants, pigs, and equids [10–12], standardised tests for the diagnosis
97 of melioidosis in all susceptible species are currently lacking. A recent study highlighted the
98 effectiveness of serological tests developed for glanders (a disease caused by *B. mallei*, a
99 bacterium closely related to *B. pseudomallei*) for accurately detecting melioidosis in equids.
100 These tests include both a reference method (CFT) and alternative methods (ELISA, Western
101 blot) [13].

102 The bacterium B. pseudomallei is primarily found in moist clay soils and in turbid waters 103 [14,15]. Its distribution in soils is strongly influenced by climatic events, with more cases 104 observed during the rainy season and sporadic contamination peaking during extreme weather 105 events such as storms or floods [16,17]. Environmental detection of B. pseudomallei is 106 challenging and specific culture protocols are required to isolate the bacterium [18]. Its 107 detection could be harder in non-endemic areas where the bacterium may be present at lower 108 levels. A new culture medium, with erythritol as a carbon source, was recently developed to 109 improve culture isolation from soil samples [19]. It was successfully used to isolate B. 110 pseudomallei from a rice farm in South-Central Ghana, Western Africa [20].

111 Cases of melioidosis have been reported in both South, Central and North America. This 112 includes the French West Indies, i.e., Guadeloupe and Martinique, where 21 human cases have 113 been recorded since 1993 [21–25], some of whom had no history of travel to endemic areas. In 114 contrast, no human cases have been reported in French Guiana (Guiana Shield, South America), 115 while human cases have been reported in neighboring Brazil [3], as well as in Venezuela and 116 Colombia [26].

117 The objective of this study was to demonstrate the local establishment of *B. pseudomallei* in 118 French Guiana and Guadeloupe. We aimed to document animal exposure through a serology 119 study, to document their immune response over time, and to investigate the link between 120 seropositive animals and the presence of *B. pseudomallei* in their close environment. The

serological analysis was performed with an ELISA kit – using a recombinant protein and
double antigen technology – originally developed for the diagnosis of equine glanders [11] and
was used in our study on different domestic species (goats, cattle, equids and sheep).

124

125 Materials and Methods

126 Animal sampling in French Guiana and Guadeloupe

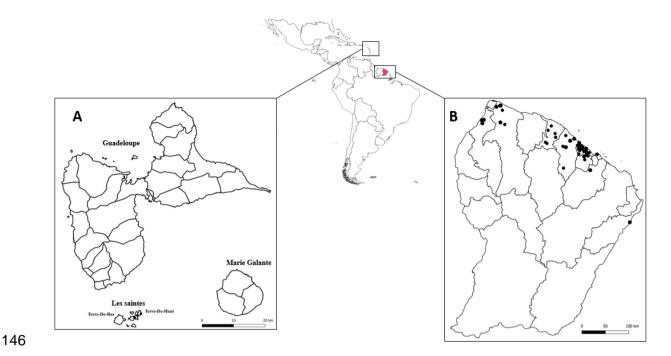
127 In French Guiana, a total of 56 farms were surveyed, primarily along the northern coast where 80% of the population resides (Fig. 1A). These farms included both single-species and 128 129 multispecies farms, and 2 to 31 animals per farm were analysed. Among the different regions, 130 24 farms were located in Macouria, 14 in Kourou, 9 in Mana, 7 in Saint Laurent du Maroni, 5 131 in Sinnamary, 3 in Montsinery Tonnegrande, 2 in Saint George de l'Oyapack and Cayenne, and 132 1 in Roura and Iracoubo. Notably, 10 of these farms had multiple species, including cattle, 133 sheep and equids. In Les Saintes, part of the Guadeloupe archipelago, two goat farms were sampled, Farm A with approximately 40 goats and Farm B with approximately 60 goats on the 134 135 island of Terre de Haut (Fig. 1B). On both farms, mixed-sex goats grazed freely in open 136 pastures, consuming local vegetation, and no birth control measures were used, hence the approximate herd sizes reported by the farmers. The topography of the pastures was 137 138 characterized by steep terrain and both were susceptible to significant surface water runoff.

Blood samples were collected between November 2021 and December 2022 from i) cattle (361
animals from 37 farms), sheep (131 animals from 15 farms), goats (100 animals from 10 farms),
equids (63 animals from six farms), and pigs (15 animals from one farm) in French Guiana,

142 and ii) goats (31 animals from two farms) in Les Saintes.

143

Fig 1. Map of sampling sites. Farms where animals were tested in (A) Guadeloupe and (B)
French Guiana are represented as black dots.



After blood clotting and centrifugation at 900 rpm for 10 min, sera were collected, heatinactivated at 60°C for 30 min and stored at -20°C until analysis.

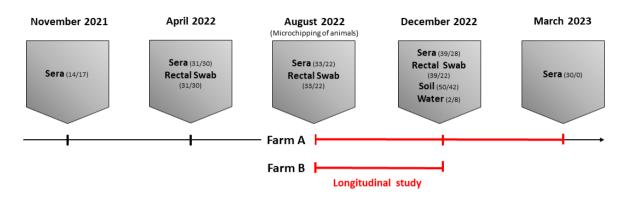
In some farms with GLANDA-ELISA positive animals (see § Serological analysis hereafter), 149 serological longitudinal monitoring was conducted. In French Guiana, additional serological 150 151 tests were conducted in one equid farm between October 2021 and January 2022. In Les Saintes, a more detailed longitudinal study was conducted in the two goat farms. Blood samples 152 153 were collected between November 2021 and March 2023 (farm A) or December 2022 (farm 154 B) (Fig 2). Rectal swabs were collected in duplicate for each animal between April 2022 and December 2022 (Fig 2). One swab was stored dry at -20°C until PCR analysis, while the second 155 was stored in Luria-Bertani (LB)-20% glycerol at -20°C for culture. 156

157 Animal sampling protocols were approved by the IRD Ethics Committee (21 April 2022).

Fig 2. Sampling timeline in two goat farms in Les Saintes, Guadeloupe. Sampling occurred
between November 2021 and March 2023. The longitudinal serological study (indicated in red)
took place between August 2022 and March 2023 for farm A, and between August 2022 and

162 December 2022 for farm B. The numbers in parentheses correspond to the number of samples

163 collected from farms A and B, respectively.



164

165 Environmental sampling in Guadeloupe

166 Soil and water samples were collected from both goat pastures (farms A and B) in December 2022 during the rainy season (Fig 2). Soil samples (n = 50 in farm A, n = 42 in farm B) were 167 collected every 5 m along a series of transects perpendicular to the main slope of the pasture. 168 Each transect was distant by at least 6 m from the previous transect. Samples were collected 169 170 30 cm deep with a standard soil auger that was disinfected with absolute ethanol after each 171 sampling. Approximately 200 g of soil was collected and placed in closed Ziploc bags to 172 maintain moisture. Samples were stored at room temperature (approximately 25°C) and 173 protected from light until shipped to France. Samples were analysed within two weeks of 174 collection (see § Environmental sample processing). Water samples were collected in farm A 175 (n = 2) and B (n = 8) in goat drinking troughs.

All samples (both animal and environmental) were sent to Anses, Maisons-Alfort, France, tobe processed.

178

179 Serological analysis

The ID Screen[®]Glanders Double Antigen Multi-species ELISA test (Innovative Diagnostics,
Grabels, France) (hereafter referred to as GLANDA-ELISA) was used according to the
manufacturer's instructions. This test does not rely on the use of a specific conjugate and can

therefore be used for multiple animal species. The relative amounts of antibodies in serum samples were calculated by reference to the positive and the negative controls provided in the kit. The serological titer (expressed as the Sample to Positive ratio or S/P%) was calculated using the optical density (OD) reading at 450 nm following the formula: S/P% = ((OD sample - OD negative control) / (OD positive control - OD negative control)) x 100. Serum samples with S/P% <70% were considered negative and \geq 70% were considered positive.

189

190 Additional serological tests on equine sera, French Guiana

191 The complement fixation test (CFT), the reference method for glanders in equids, was 192 performed as previously described using the cold method with the Malleus CFT antigen 193 (Bioveta, Czech Republic) [27]. Serum samples were initially tested at 1/5 dilution. Samples 194 with 100% hemolysis were considered negative, those with 25-75% hemolysis were 195 considered doubtful, and those with 100% inhibition of hemolysis were considered positive. 196 All samples primarily identified as suspect or positive were retested over a range of dilutions. 197 The "titer" is a six-digit barcode corresponding to the intensity of hemolysis inhibition (0 =198 0%; 1 = 25%; 2 = 50%; 3 = 75%; 4 = 100%) at the reciprocal dilutions (1/5, 1/10, 1/20, 1/40, 1/20 199 1/80, 1/160) for each sample. Anti-complementary activity (due to incomplete elimination of 200 complement proteins during the serum heat inactivation) was checked for each serum. 201 Additionally, the Luminex assay, originally developed for the diagnosis of glanders in equids, 202 was performed as previously described using the heat shock protein (GroEL) (BPSL2697) and 203 hemolysin-coregulated protein (Hcp1) (BPSS1498) antigens [28]. MRI#1 was used as positive 204 control to determine S/P%, which was calculated for each antigen using the same formula as 205 in the GLANDA-ELISA. S/P% values greater than 45% for GroEL and 43% for Hcp1 were 206 considered positive.

208 Environmental sample processing

209 Each soil sample was homogenized, and 10 g of soil was diluted in 10 mL of sterile water. 210 After vigorous vortexing, the suspension was shaken on an orbital shaker at 160 rpm for one 211 hour and then allowed to settle for 10 min. From the supernatant, 1 mL was centrifuged at 212 8,000 rpm for 10 min and the resulting pellet was stored at -80°C until PCR analysis and 1 mL 213 was used for a two-step enrichment. First, 1 mL of supernatant was mixed with 9 mL of liquid 214 Ashdown medium [29] and incubated at 37°C for 48 h. Second, the Ashdown enrichment was 215 mixed, and 1 mL was transferred to 9 mL of erythritol medium [19] and incubated at 37°C for 216 96 h. One mL of erythritol enrichment was centrifuged at 8,000 rpm for 10 min and the 217 resulting pellet was stored at -80°C until PCR analysis. The remaining 9 mL of enriched 218 medium was stored at 4°C.

Within two hours of collection, 50 mL of each water sample were filtered sequentially through a 3 μ m filter followed by a 0.2 μ m filter. The 0.2 μ m filters were folded in four, preserved in Lysogeny Broth (LB) (10 g peptone, 5 g yeast extract, 10 g NaCl for 1 L)-glycerol 20% and stored at -80°C until analysis. For analysis, the LB-glycerol 20% was discarded and the filters were aseptically cut in half. One half was placed in 10 mL of liquid Ashdown medium and followed the enrichment protocol described above, while the other half was stored at -80°C for PCR analysis.

226

227 DNA extraction and PCR analysis

The swab heads were cut and placed into the lysis buffer. The half filters, used for filtering the water samples, were ribolysed for three cycles of 20 s at 5,500 rpm (Lysing Matrix E two mL, MPBio, Eschwege, Germany) and DNA extraction was performed on 800 μ L of the supernatant. Soil supernatants without pre-enrichment were extracted using the DNeasy PowerSoil Pro kit (QIAGEN, Hilden, Germany), while supernatants from enriched soil/water samples and rectal swabs were extracted using the High Pure PCR Template Preparation kit
(Roche, Mannheim, Germany) according to the manufacturer's instructions. To ensure
extraction efficiency, an internal inhibition extraction control (Xeno[™] DNA control or
Diagenode IPC, Thermofisher) was added to each sample.

237 An initial PCR screening was performed using a real-time PCR assay targeting the B. pseudomallei complex and targeting aroA [30]. DNA samples that tested positive were further 238 239 tested using real-time PCR assays targeting specific regions of the B. pseudomallei genome (orf11, BPSS0087, BPSS0745, and/or BPTT4176-4290) [31,32] and/or B. thailandensis (70) 240 241 kDa) [33]. Each PCR reaction contained 5 µL of DNA and 15 µL of reaction mix, 1X of Universal Mastermix TaqManTM Fast Advanced 2X (Applied BiosystemsTM, Vilnius, 242 243 Lithuania), 0.5 µM of each primer, 0.1 µM of probe, 1X of IPC Diagenode and 2.8 µL of sterile 244 water. The amplification procedure included a 2-min incubation at 50°C followed by a 245 denaturation step at 95°C for 20 sec, then 45 cycles at 95°C for 3 sec and 60°C for 30 sec.

246

247 Culture and screening of suspected colonies

248 Enrichment broths stored at 4°C were homogenized and 100 µL were plated on both conventional Ashdown agar and modified *B. cepacia* CHROMagarTM agar (CHROMagar, 249 Paris, France) supplemented with 4% glycerol, 500 mg/mL gentamicin and 130 mg/mL 250 251 fosfomycin (CHR GGF). Plates were incubated at 37°C and monitored daily. Suspect colonies 252 (purple on Ashdown, green on CHR_GGF) were transferred to non-selective blood agar plates 253 containing 5% horse serum (BA) and incubated at 37°C for 24 h. The bacterial suspensions were resuspended in sterile water, heated at 100°C for 20 min, and then centrifuged at 13,000 254 255 g for 10 min. The supernatant was used for PCR analysis (aroA and orf11 systems) to confirm 256 colonies identification. Isolates confirmed to be B. pseudomallei by PCR were further characterized and their antimicrobial resistance pattern identified. 257

258 B. pseudomallei strain characterization

259 Antibiogram

Antibiotic susceptibility testing was performed using the disk diffusion method according to 260 261 European Committee on Antimicrobial Susceptibility Testing (EUCAST) guidelines [34]. The 262 antibiotics tested included: amoxicillin-clavulanate (20-10 µg), meropenem (10 µg), trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole $(1.25-23.75 \mu g)$, chloramphenicol $(30 \mu g)$, imipenem $(10 \mu g)$, 263 264 ceftazidime (10 µg), and tetracycline (30 µg) (Bio-Rad, France). Fresh 0.5 McFarland 265 suspensions were prepared and plated on Mueller-Hinton agar (Bio-Rad, France). Antibiotic 266 discs were then placed on the agar and plates were incubated at 35°C for 18 h. EUCAST 267 breakpoints were used for interpretation. Two reference strains, Escherichia coli ATCC 25922 and Staphylococcus aureus ATCC 29213, were included as controls. 268

269

270 Biochemical testing

The API 20 NE system (Biomérieux, France) was used according to the manufacturer's instructions. Bacterial suspensions were adjusted to a 0.5 McFarland standard and the API cassette was then incubated at 29°C for 24 h. The internet-based APIWEB database (accessed 7 April 2023, Biomérieux, France, https://apiweb.biomerieux.com/) was used to interpret the obtained profiles. Simultaneously, an oxidase test (oxidase reagent 50 x 0.75 mL, Biomérieux, France) was performed on each colony.

277

278 Multilocus sequence typing (MLST)

MLST was performed as previously described [35]. Amplified fragments were sent to Eurofins
in Germany for sequencing. The sequences were compared to the *Burkholderia pseudomallei*PubMLST database for MLST profiling

- 282 (https://pubmlst.org/https://pubmlst.org/organisms/burkholderia-pseudomallei, accessed 17
- 283 February 2023) [36].
- 284
- 285 Results
- 286

287 Serological survey in French Guiana and Guadeloupe

In French Guiana, seropositivity rates were 16% (58/361) in cattle, 2% (2/100) in goats, 3% (4/131) in sheep, 24% (15/63) in equids and 0% (0/15) in pigs (Table 1). The highest S/P% were observed in cattle, sheep and equids. In Les Saintes, 39% (12/31) of goats were seropositive (Table 1) and distributed over two farms (5/14 in farm A; 7/17 in farm B (Table 2)), with S/P% ranging from 0 to 503%.

293

Table 1. Summary of the serology (GLANDA-ELISA) results in livestock in French Guiana (n = 670) and Les Saintes, Guadeloupe (n = 31)

S/P% serological titer expressed as the Sample to Positive ratio (calculated using a formula,
see § Materials and Methods). Serum samples with S/P% ≥70% were considered positive.
Farms where at least one animal tested GLANDA-ELISA positive were considered positive.

Sampling site		Guadeloupe				
Animal species	Cattle	Goats	Sheep	Equids	Pigs	Goats
Number of positive animals/total (%)	58/361 (16)	2/100 (2)	4/131 (3)	15/63 (24)	0/15 (0)	12/31 (39)
[Min - Max] S/P%	[0-507]	[0-99]	[0-413]	[0-435]	[0-22]	[0-503]
Number of positive farms/total (%)*	17/37 (45)	2/10 (20)	2/15 (13)	4/6 (66)	0/1 (0)	2/2 (100)

* The number of farms in the table is higher than the total number of farms tested, as 10 farms included more than one

animal species, i.e., appear in several columns.

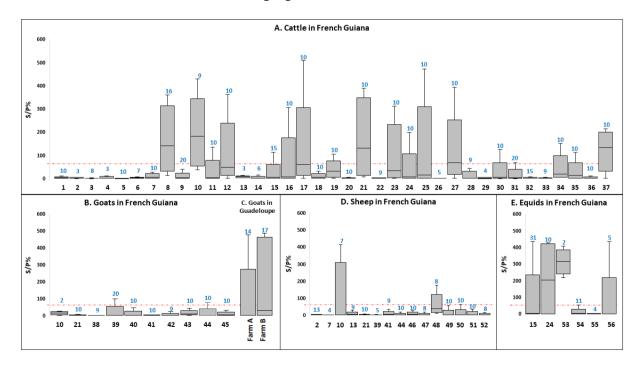
299

300 In French Guiana, 25 out of 56 farms were tested positive, of which 10 included multiple 301 species. Sixteen were in three townships: Macouria (n = 8), Kourou (n = 4), Sinnamary (n = 4). The serological results showed heterogeneity both between farms, differentiating positive
and negative farms, as well as within positive farms, where both positive and negative animals
were detected. Positive animals showed variable S/P% (Fig 3, S1 Table). For example, among
the 25 ELISA-positive farms in French Guiana, 10 farms included animals with S/P% > 200.

306

307 Fig 3. Summary of GLANDA-ELISA results per farm per animal species

308 (A) cattle (n = 37), (B) goats in French Guiana (n = 10), (C) goats in Les Saintes (n = 2), (D) sheep (n = 15), (E) equids (n = 6). S/P%: serological titer expressed as the Sample to Positive 309 310 ratio. The x-axis shows the farm identification numbers. Farms are numbered from 1 to 56, 311 when several species were on the same farm, the same number is used. The total number of animals tested per farm is shown in blue above each box plot. The red dotted line represents 312 313 the S/P% threshold (70%). The bar above and below the box plot indicates the minimum and maximum S/P%. The top and bottom of the box indicate the 1^{st} and 3^{rd} quartiles of S/P%. The 314 bar in the box indicates the median. Due to the small number of pig farms tested, we have 315 316 excluded these data from the following figure.



319 Additional analysis on equids from French Guiana and follow-up on farm #24

In French Guiana, equids originating from six farms out of 56 (2 to 31 equids per farm; n=63) were further tested by two additional methods developed for the diagnosis of glanders: the reference CFT method and the newly developed Luminex method using GroEL and Hcp1 antigens [28]. All equids with ELISA-positive results were confirmed positive with Hcp1 by Luminex, but negative with CFT and with GroEL by Luminex except for farm 24 (**Table 2**). In this farm, some of the horses/equids were tested positive with CFT.

326

327 Table 2. Serology results from 63 equids from six farms in French Guiana

328 GLANDA-ELISA: enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay with the ID Screen® Glanders 329 Double Antigen Multi-species ELISA test (Innovative Diagnostics, Grabels, France). CFT: 330 complement fixation test (see § Materiel and methods; Additional serological tests on equine 331 sera, French Guiana). S/P%: serological titer expressed as the Sample to Positive ratio. 332 Luminex: bead-based assay targeting recombinant proteins Hcp1 or GroEL. Id: animal 333 identifier; P: positive; D: doubtful; N: negative; AC: anti-complementarity (interpretation not 334 possible); na: not analysed; ns: not sampled.

		GLANDA-ELISA (P≥70%)	CFT	Luminex - Hcp1 (P≥43%)	Luminex - GroEL (P≥45%)
Id	Farm (sampling date)	Result (S/P%)	Result ^a	Result (S/P%)	Result (S/P%)
03684		P (411%)	Ν	P (103%)	N (27%)
03685		N (0%)	Ν	N (19%)	N (5%)
03686		P (424%)	Ν	P (107%)	N (7%)
03687		N (0%)	Ν	N (1%)	N (2%)
03688		N (0%)	Ν	N (31%)	N (4%)
03689		N (1%)	Ν	N (5%)	N (9%)
03690	Farm 15 (Mar-21)	N (0%)	Ν	N (8%)	N (3%)
03691		N (0%)	Ν	N (3%)	N (5%)
03692		N (0%)	Ν	N (3%)	N (29%)
03693		N (1%)	Ν	N (4%)	N (6%)
03694		P (137%)	Ν	P (107%)	N (1%)
03695		N (0%)	Ν	N (2%)	N (4%)
03696		N (44%)	Ν	P (98%)	N (2%)

03697		P (144%)	Ν	P (66%)	N (4%)
03698		N (1%)	Ν	N (28%)	N (15%)
03699		N (0%)	Ν	N (0%)	N (2%)
03700		N (0%)	Ν	N (4%)	N (10%)
03701		N (5%)	Ν	N (17%)	N (8%)
03702		N (20%)	Ν	N (2%)	N (14%)
03703		P (419%)	Ν	P (99%)	N (11%)
03704		P (435%)	Ν	P (108%)	N (4%)
03705		N (0%)	Ν	N (5%)	N (6%)
03706		N (0%)	AC	N (5%)	N (17%)
03707		N (0%)	N	N (1%)	N (1%)
03708		N (11%)	Ν	N (17%)	N (3%)
03709		N (25%)	Ν	N (17%)	N (10%)
03710		N (5%)	N	P (76%)	N (10%)
)3711		N (0%)	N	N (19%)	N (5%)
)3712		N (0%)	N	N (1%)	N (0%)
)3713		N (0%)	AC	N (2%)	P (58%)
)3714		P (203%)	N	P (68%)	N (3%)
11786		N (0%) / N (0%)	N / N	N (2%) / N (2%)	N (16%) / N (12%)
11787		P (382%) / P (413%)	P^1/P^2	P (104%) / P (101%)	N (2%) / N (2%)
L1788		P (296%) / P (387%)	N / N	P (90%) / P (58%)	N (2%) / N (1%)
L1789		P (420%) / P (406%)	P^3/P^4	P (101%) / P (111%)	N (3%) / N (4%)
11790	Farm 24	N (0%) / N (0%)	P ⁵ / P ⁶	N (1%) / N (8%)	N (19%) / N (12%)
11791	(Oct-21 / Jan-22)	N (0%) / ns	r / r D ⁷ / ns	N (3%) / ns	N (29%) / N (12%)
			ns / P ⁸		
01034		ns / N (0%)		na	na
01036		ns / N (56%)	ns / N	na na (D. (acci)	na
01038		ns / P (427%)	ns / N	ns / P (96%)	ns / N (2%)
01040		ns / P (408%)	ns / D ⁹	ns / P (106%)	ns / N (3%)
03671	Farm 53	P (407%)	N	P (96%)	N (11%)
03672	(Mar-21)	P (217%)	Ν	P (70%)	N (6%)
03673		N (0%)	AC	N (1%)	N (15%)
03674		N (3%)	Ν	N (1%)	N (3%)
03675		N (2%)	Ν	N (4%)	N (3%)
03676		N (1%)	Ν	N (11%)	N (12%)
03677	Farm 54	N (0%)	AC	N (1%)	N (5%)
03678	(Mar-21)	N (51%)	Ν	N (38%)	N (3%)
03679	,,	N (1%)	Ν	N (14%)	N (15%)
03680		N (0%)	Ν	N (2%)	N (2%)
03681		N (0%)	Ν	N (3%)	N (5%)
03682		N (1%)	Ν	N (2%)	N (3%)
03683	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	N (3%)	AC	N (7%)	N (3%)
04240		N (2%)	Ν	N (8%)	N (5%)
04241	Farm 55	N (3%)	Ν	N (6%)	N (3%)
		NI (00()	AC	N (1%)	N (0%)
04242	(Mar-21)	N (0%)	110	(\cdot, \cdot)	
04242 04243	(IVIar-21)	N (0%)	N	N (0%)	N (0%)

05947	(Apr-21)	P (435%)	Ν	P (99%)	N (4%)
05948		N (0%)	Ν	N (7%)	N (0%)
05949		N (0%)	Ν	N (1%)	N (6%)
05950		N (1%)	Ν	N (2%)	N (3%)

^aCFT titer mentioned in the footnote. ¹444310, ²431000, ³444431, ⁴421000, ⁵444431, ⁶421000, ⁷222100, ⁸431000, ⁹200000.

335

336 Focused study in two goat farms in Les Saintes, Guadeloupe

337

338 Serological and molecular biology study

339 To investigate the temporal evolution of the serological response in two goat farms that initially

tested ELISA-positive in November 2021, additional blood samples were collected in April

341 2022, August 2022, and December 2022. Farm A was also sampled again in March 2023.

342 Seropositive animals were consistently detected in both farms at all-time points, although the

343 percentage of positive animals varied over time. It ranged from 13% to 36% in farm A and

from 23% to 41% in farm B. The highest number of ELISA-positive animals was observed in

both farms in November 2021 (Table 3).

Rectal swabs were collected in parallel with blood samples to test for the fecal shedding of *B*.

347 *pseudomallei*. In total, six swabs tested positive by PCR for the *B. pseudomallei* complex, of

which two were positive for *B. pseudomallei* species, one collected in April 2022 and one in
December 2022 in farm A (Table 3).

350

351 Table 3. Serological and molecular results from two goat farms in Les Saintes,352 Guadeloupe

The ratio of real-time PCR-positive rectal swabs samples to the total number of samples tested is provided for six gene targets. The PCR cycle threshold (Ct) is provided for positive samples. ELISA: enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay with the ID Screen® Glanders Double Antigen

356 Multi-species ELISA test (Innovative Diagnostics, Grabels, France).

Farm	Date of			<i>Bpm</i> complex	Bpm				Bt
r ai ili	sampling	pos/tot (%)	[min - max] S/P%	aroA	orf11	BPSS087	BPSS0745	BPSS4208	70 kDa
	Nov-21	5/14 (36)	[0 - 494]	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
	Apr-22	4/31 (13)	[0 - 373]	$2/31^{(Ct \ 43;38)}$	1/2 ^(Ct 37)	0/2	0/2	0/2	0/2
Farm	Aug-22	8/33 (24)	[0 - 289]	0/33	0/33	na	na	na	na
Α	Dec-22	11/39 (28)	[0 - 395]	$1/39^{(Ct41)}$	1/1 ^(Ct 39)	1/1 ^(Ct 38)	$1/1^{(Ct41)}$	0/1	0/1
	Mar-23	7/30 (23)	[0 - 396]	0/30	na	na	na	na	na
	Nov-21	7/17 (41)	[0 - 503]	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Farm B	Apr-22	7/30 (23)	[0 - 351]	3/30 (Ct 39;40;37)	0/3	na	na	na	na
В	Aug-22	5/22 (23)	[0 - 343]	0/22	0/22	na	na	na	na
	Dec-22	7/25 (28)	[0 - 455]	0/25	0/25	na	na	na	na

Bpm: Burkholderia pseudomallei, Bt: Burkholderia thailandensis. Apr: April; Aug: August; Mar: March; Nov:
November; Dec: December. ns: not sampled; na: not analysed (samples for which *aroA* and *orf11* PCR analysis
were negative). Pos/tot (%): number of positive animals/total (percentage), S/P%: serological titer expressed as
the Sample to Positive ratio.

362 The longitudinal serological study started in August 2022, when as many goats as possible 363 were implanted with a microchip to identify individual goats. In farm A, 20 goats were sampled 364 three times: 13 were consistently ELISA-negative, five were consistently ELISA-positive and 365 two changed status during the course of the 8-month study (Table 4). Of note, six goats had 366 S/P% greater than 200% on at least two sampling events. One goat with the lowest S/P% 367 (\approx 150%) later tested negative in March 2023. Conversely, two goats with initially low S/P% 368 later had higher values. Of the seven goats that were seropositive at some point, five were over 369 one year of age. The two identified mother-daughter pairs were consistently negative. 370 In farm B, 11 animals were sampled in August and December 2022. Eight tested ELISA-371 negative twice, one tested ELISA-positive twice, and two changed status during the course of

- the study (seroconversion). All three animals that were seropositive at some points were over
- one year of age and had S/P% values greater than 200%.

Table 4. Longitudinal serological study in two goat farms in Les Saintes, Guadeloupe
GLANDA-ELISA: enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay with the ID Screen® Glanders
Double Antigen Multi-species ELISA test (Innovative Diagnostics, Grabels, France). S/P%:

- 378 serological titer expressed as the Sample to Positive ratio, N: negative (S/P% <70), P: positive
- 379 $(S/P\% \ge 70\%)$, F: female, M: male, m: month old, y: year-old, ns: not sampled (farm B was not
- 380 sampled in March 2023).
- 381 * 5483 is the mother of 5482; ** 5574 is the mother of 5465.

			_	GLANDA-ELISA result (S/P%)				
Farm	Id Animal	Sex	Age	Aug-22	Nov-22	Mar-23		
	1625	F	4 m	N (0%)	N (0%)	N (0%)		
	5456	F	4 m	N (0%)	N (0%)	N (0%)		
	5482*	F	4 m	N (3%)	N (3%)	ns		
	5465**	F	4 m	N (0%)	N (0%)	ns		
	5578	F	4 m	N (0%)	N (0%)	N (0%)		
	5486	F	6 m	P (140%)	P (377%)	P (385%)		
	5554	F	6 m	N (1%)	N (1%)	N (0%)		
	5464	F	1 y	N (1%)	P (389%)	P (393%)		
	5626	F	1 y	N (1%)	N (1%)	N (3%)		
	5469	F	2у	P (147%)	P (164%)	N (55%)		
Farm	5473	F	3 у	P (289%)	P (395%)	P (326%)		
Α	5472	F	4 y	P (265%)	P (385%)	P (396%)		
	5478	F	4 y	P (240%)	P (109%)	P (247%)		
	5571	F	4 y	N (1%)	N (3%)	N (0%)		
	5483*	F	5 y	N (1%)	N (0%)	N (0%)		
	5574**	F	5 y	N (0%)	N (0%)	N (0%)		
	5460	F	8 y	N (2%)	N (6%)	N (2%)		
	5546	М	6 m	N (1%)	N (0%)	N (0%)		
	5560	Μ	6 m	N (2%)	N (10%)	N (1%)		
	5476	Μ	6 m	P (263%)	P (384%)	P (384%)		
	5477	Μ	3 у	N (1%)	N (1%)	N (0%)		
	5461	Μ	6 y	N (7%)	N (4%)	N (1%)		
-	ositive / total			6/20	7/20	7/20		
l	tested 5496	F	1 y	N (0%)	N (7%)			
	5492	F	3 y	N (2%)	N (1%)			
	5652	F	4 y	N (0%)	N (0%)			
	5435	F	5 y	P (272%)	P (455%)			
Farm	5646	F	бу	N (32%)	P (398%)			
В	5506	M	су 2 у	N (1%)	N (7%)	ns		
	5562	M	2 y 2 y	N (2%)	N (67%)	115		
	5606	M	2 y 2 y	N (34%)	N (59%)			
	5610	M	2 y 2 y	N (14%)	P (379%)			
	5640	M	2 y 2 y	N (0%)	N (2%)			
	5690	M	2 y 2 y	N (0%)	N (3%)			

Total positive / total		
tested	1/11	3/11

382 *Environmental sampling in goat pastures*

383	In December 2022, 50 soil samples and two water samples (from the drinking troughs) were
384	collected from farm A; and 42 soil samples and eight water samples (from the drinking troughs)
385	were collected from farm B. All samples were analysed by PCR and bacteriological culture.
386	Samples from farm A were all PCR-negative, pre- or post-enrichment. In farm B, two out of
387	42 soil samples (#313 and #336) were PCR-positive for the B. pseudomallei complex post-
388	enrichment, but only sample #313 tested PCR-positive for B. pseudomallei (all four specific
389	targets) (Table 5).
390	
390 391	Table 5. Results from molecular testing of environmental samples from two goat farms
	Table 5. Results from molecular testing of environmental samples from two goat farms in Les Saintes, Guadeloupe
391	
391 392	in Les Saintes, Guadeloupe
391 392 393	in Les Saintes, Guadeloupe Soil and water samples collected in December 2022 were tested by real-time PCR for the

Farm	Type of Number of		Кларт Кларт			Bpm			
	sample	e samples	aroA	orf11	BPSS087	BPSS0745	BPSS4208	70 kDa	
Farm	soil	50	0/50*	na	na	na	na	na	
Α	water	2	0/2	na	na	na	na	na	
Farm	soil	42	2/42* (Ct 34;34)	$1/2^{*(Ct \ 40)}$	1/2*(Ct 38)	1/2*(Ct 37)	1/2*(Ct 39)	0/2*	
B	water	8	0/8	na	na	na	na	na	

397 Bpm: Burkholderia pseudomallei, Bt: Burkholderia thailandensis. * PCR results were obtained post-enrichment
 398 (see § Material and Methods).

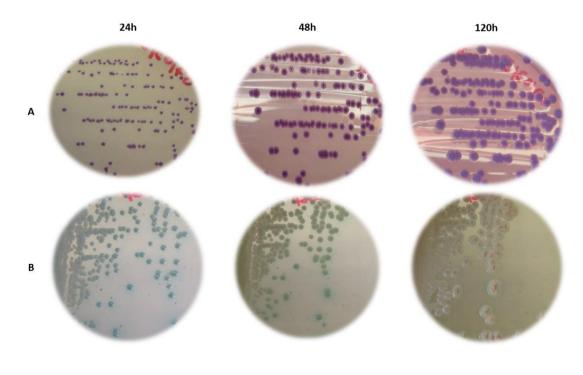
PCR-positive soil samples #313 and #336 were plated post-enrichment on both Ashdown and
CHR_GGF agar media for isolation. A total of 46 suspect colonies were isolated from soil
#313. Of these, 30 were PCR-positive for the *B. pseudomallei* complex and all four *B. pseudomallei* specific targets. Fifteen suspect colonies were isolated from soil #336 and tested

404 PCR-positive for the *B. pseudomallei* complex but PCR-negative for *B. pseudomallei* and *B.*405 *thailandensis*.

B. pseudomallei colonies on Ashdown initially appeared purple and smooth after 24 h at 37°C
and then changed to a rough, dry texture after 48 h (Fig 4A). On CHR_GGF, the same
morphological changes were observed: colonies were green and smooth after 24 h of culture,
but changed to a white, rough, and dry texture after 120 h (Fig 4B).

410

Fig 4. *Burkholderia pseudomallei* strain D22-10884_313#20 cultures. Photographs from
culture plates (A) on Ashdown and (B) on CHR_GGF (modified *B. cepacia* CHROMagar[™]
agar supplemented with 4% glycerol, 500 mg/mL gentamicin and 130 mg/mL fosfomycin)
after a 24, 48 and 120 h incubation at 37°C. The strain was isolated from soil #313 collected
from farm B in Les Saintes, Guadeloupe.



417

One *B. pseudomallei* colony (D22-10884_S313#20) isolated from soil #313 was selected for
further analysis. The strain showed the API 20 NE profile 1-456-574 together with a positive
result for the oxidase test. When compared with the profiles listed in APIWEB, the strain had

the highest identification scores with *B. pseudomallei* (47.9%) and *B. cepacia* (45.3%). The
antibiotic susceptibility profile of strain D22-10884_S313#20 showed sensitivity to all
antibiotics tested (commonly used for human melioidosis treatment): amoxicillin-clavulanate,
ceftazidime, tetracycline, imipenem, meropenem, trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole and
chloramphenicol (S2 Table). The MLST sequence type of strain D22-10884_S313#20 was
ST92.

427

428 Discussion

429

430 By interpreting positive ELISA results in animals as a sign of previous environmental exposure 431 to B. pseudomallei, our serological screening showed variable results between regions but also 432 between species. In French Guiana, the seroprevalence was 2% in sheep and goats, 15% in 433 cattle and 22% in equids; in Les Saintes, where only goats were tested, the seroprevalence was 434 39%. In comparison, studies carried out in endemic countries using different serological 435 methods showed seroprevalence of 6% and 13.6% in sheep, 0.3% and 2.6% in goats, and 2% 436 and 7.6% in cattle, in Thailand (using IHA) [37] and Malaysia (using CFT) [38], respectively. 437 Due to different levels of endemicity and methodological strategies, the data are not easily 438 comparable. Our serological screening also showed within-farm variability. The longitudinal 439 study conducted in two ELISA-positive farms in Les Saintes showed that most goats remained 440 ELISA-positive over an 8-month period. Further studies are needed to better understand the long-term immune response dynamics after exposure to B. pseudomallei. This should help to 441 explain the within-farm heterogeneity, i.e., why animals living in farms with similar 442 443 environmental exposure do not all show the same serological result.

445 Melioidosis has been studied primarily in well-established endemic regions such as Southeast 446 Asia and Australia with limited research in Central and South America [26,39]. In the Caribbean, human cases have been documented for over 30 years in Guadeloupe and 447 448 Martinique [21–23,25] but the local presence of *B. pseudomallei* in the environment has never 449 been established. Isolating the strain from the environment is challenging, as demonstrated by a recent environmental survey in Puerto Rico where only three out of 500 soil samples from 60 450 451 sites tested positive for *B. pseudomallei* using PCR, with only one sample being culture positive [40]. Previous exposure to *B. pseudomallei* promotes an immune response in animals that can 452 453 be detected serologically. Hence, one major objective of our study was to confirm the benefit 454 of an initial serological screening in animals to increase the probability of detecting B. 455 pseudomallei in the environment.

456 The GLANDA-ELISA kit, originally developed for the diagnosis of equine glanders [11], was 457 used on a goat farm in New Caledonia where one case of melioidosis was confirmed. The serological survey allowed to confirm exposure in 35% of goats on this farm, while those from 458 459 three other farms with no clinical case were 100% seronegative (Laroucau et al., en révision). However, the validation of this ELISA kit in detecting clinical melioidosis and/or previous 460 461 exposure to *B. pseudomallei* called for further data. The application of the GLANDA-ELISA 462 kit in our multi-species study yielded heterogeneous results between individuals and between 463 farms, with some farms fully seronegative. Overall, serology results were consistent with the 464 absence (in French Guiana) or limited number (in Les Saintes) of human melioidosis cases.

465 Our study supports the idea that animals could be used as sentinels of *B. pseudomallei* presence 466 in the environment and that the GLANDA-ELISA kit is a relevant tool to do so. Further 467 research is now necessary to establish the specificity of this kit in a context different from its 468 original design and validation. The high diversity and prevalence of *Burkholderia* species in 469 the environment, including closely related species within the *B. pseudomallei* complex, raises 470 concerns about the possibility of cross-reactivity. Since the identity of the protein used in the 471 GLANDA-ELISA kit is not disclosed, it is not possible to assess its degree of conservation in 472 environmental *Burkholderia* strains, if any, and thus the risk of cross-reactivity when using this 473 kit. In addition, the cutoff used in our study was originally established for equine glanders in a 474 clinical context and not for the assessment of environmental exposure to *B. pseudomallei*. A 475 reevaluation of the cutoff for our specific goal and in different host species may help to refine 476 the data obtained with this kit.

While quantitative data on *B. pseudomallei* in the environment are scarce, it is plausible that in 477 478 non-endemic areas the bacteria are present at lower concentrations which might decrease the 479 probability of detection. In anticipation of this additional challenge, we conducted our environmental sampling in Les Saintes during the rainy season (June to November), a period 480 481 identified as the most favorable for the presence of *B. pseudomallei* in the soil [15]. We also 482 optimized the protocol from existing guidelines [18], adding two new media to the conventionally recommended Ashdown medium [29]. First, an erythritol-based medium was 483 484 used as the sole carbon source during the second step of a two-step enrichment to select for B. pseudomallei [19]. A similar two-step enrichment protocol (TBSS-C50 + erythritol) recently 485 allowed the isolation of environmental *B. pseudomallei* strains in Ghana, West Africa [20]. 486 487 Second, we used a chromogenic medium originally developed for the detection of *B. cepacia* 488 in clinical samples as green colonies. To increase its selectivity for *B. pseudomallei*, we 489 modified the medium by incorporating new antibiotics and confirmed that reference strains of 490 B. pseudomallei grew well on this medium (S1 Figure). To our knowledge, this is the first use of a chromogenic medium to improve the selection of B. pseudomallei colonies from poly-491 492 contaminated environmental matrices. Despite these protocol improvements, in our study only 493 one soil sample (out of 92 samples collected from seropositive farms) and a single B. *pseudomallei* strain was isolated. Although the use of media CHROMagarTM B. *cepacia* seems 494

495 promising, further protocol optimization (e.g., sample volume, enrichment time, chromogenic 496 and/or selective medium for environmental matrices) will be needed to facilitate the detection 497 and isolation of environmental strains of *B. pseudomallei*. Of note, an additional soil sample 498 tested PCR-positive for the *B. pseudomallei* complex, but not for *B. pseudomallei* or *B.* 499 *thailandensis* species. Further characterization of all non-*B. pseudomallei* strains isolated in 490 this study will help identify all the *Burkholderia* species to which animals can be exposed and 491 to assess their cross-reactivity with the GLANDA-ELISA kit.

502 Differentiating glanders (caused by *B. mallei*) from melioidosis (caused by *B. pseudomallei*) is 503 challenging due to their high antigenic similarity [13], with B. mallei being a monophyletic 504 clade within B. pseudomallei [41]. Considering that (i) the GLANDA-ELISA kit has been 505 designed for the diagnosis of equine glanders, and that (ii) glanders is frequently reported in 506 Brazil [42], a country sharing a border with French Guiana, the detection of GLANDA-ELISA 507 positive horses in French Guiana warranted further testing. Clinically healthy horses that tested 508 ELISA-positive were all Hcp1-positive by Luminex but GroEL-negative by Luminex, both 509 proteins being key markers for glanders diagnosis [28]. When adding CFT (the reference 510 method for glanders diagnosis) as a fourth test, all ELISA-positive horses were CFT-negative, 511 except for horses on farm #24. In this farm, the detection of horses positive for three out of four 512 tests relevant to glanders diagnosis prompted close surveillance. A follow-up examination three 513 months later confirmed the initial serological results as well as the absence of clinical signs 514 typical of acute glanders (e.g., respiratory distress or abscesses). Overall, the variability in test 515 results among animals in farm #24 may indicate different exposure and/or infection dynamics 516 and/or test characteristics. Despite the absence of previously reported cases of glanders or 517 melioidosis in French Guiana, the final health status of these equids remains uncertain given 518 the chronic potential of these two diseases [43–45].

Although the serological approach is generally not favored for the epidemiology of melioidosis in endemic areas, due to more frequent environmental exposure of humans and animals and the resulting challenges of interpreting positive results outside of a clinical context [46,47], this approach can be promising for non-endemic areas. The GLANDA-ELISA kit may be particularly valuable for identifying past exposure in animals and conducting targeted environmental surveys around exposed animals. This is particularly relevant for livestock that are often confined to restricted areas.

527 Our serological and molecular screening on two goat farms in Les Saintes, followed by an 528 environmental survey, confirmed fecal shedding of B. pseudomallei in one farm and 529 successfully led to the isolation of an environmental strain of *B. pseudomallei* in the other farm. These results provide the first definite confirmation of the local establishment of B. 530 531 pseudomallei in Les Saintes, Guadeloupe. They also support the hypothesis of a local 532 contamination of two cases of human melioidosis reported on the island in 1997 (a tourist that 533 visited Les Saintes for 3 weeks) [25] and in 2016 (a local resident) [23]. Importantly, the MLST 534 profile of the strain isolated from our study (ST92) was identical to that of the 1997 human 535 case [23]. In the Burkholderia pseudomallei PubMLST database, ST92 was identified in nine human strains: one from a Swiss traveler to Martinique [21], one from Puerto Rico, two from 536 537 Mexico [48], and five from Brazil [49], illustrating the restricted spatial distribution of this 538 sequence type.

Even though human melioidosis has not been reported so far in French Guiana, our results call for the implementation of environmental surveys around the ELISA-positive farms identified in this study, as well as a retrospective re-evaluation of human infections with melioidosis-like symptoms. In Guadeloupe and Martinique, where several human cases have been diagnosed in recent years [23,24], we suggest adding melioidosis to existing animal surveillance programs.

545 **Supporting information**

- 546 **S1 Table.** Serological results of animals in French Guiana and Les Saintes (Guadeloupe)
- 547 S2 Table. Antibiogram results of 22-10884_313#20 strains
- 548 **S1 Figure**. Evaluation of CHROMagarTM *B. cepacia* as a relevant media for other *Burkholderia*
- 549 strains.
- 550
- 551

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562

563 Conflicts of Interest

564 None of the authors have any financial or personal relationships with any individuals or 565 organizations that could inappropriately influence or bias this paper.

566

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- 580

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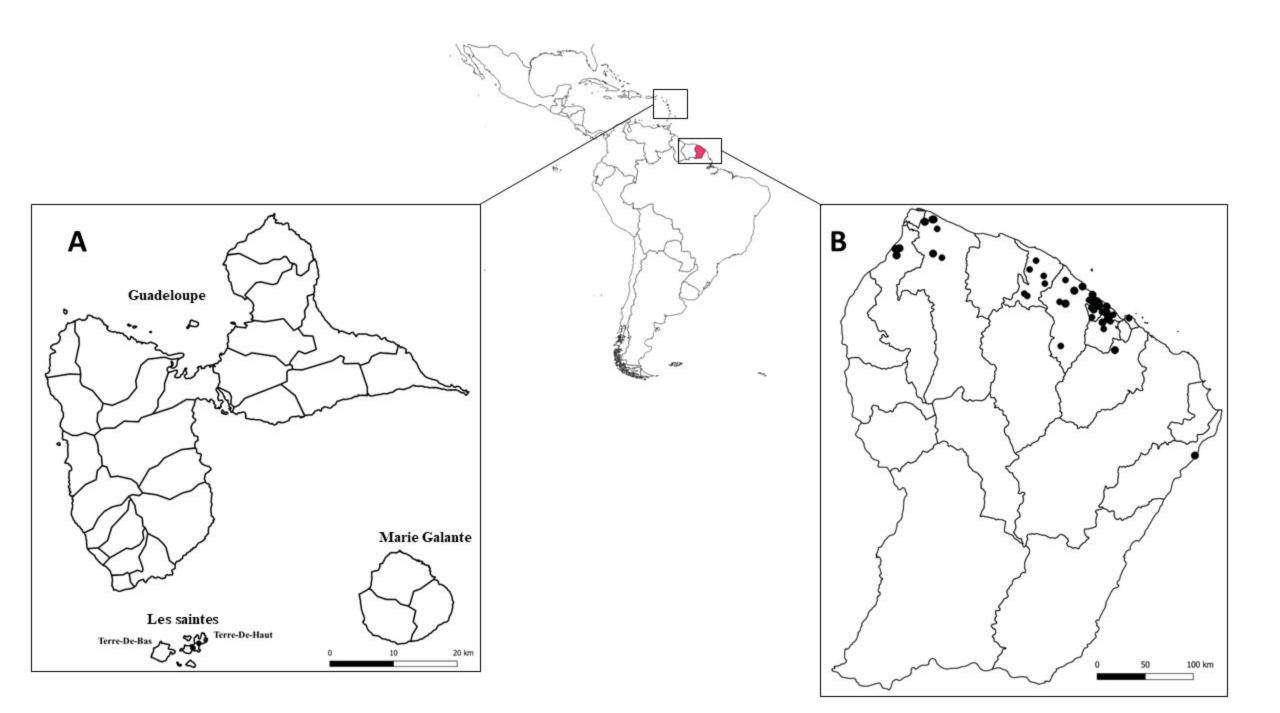
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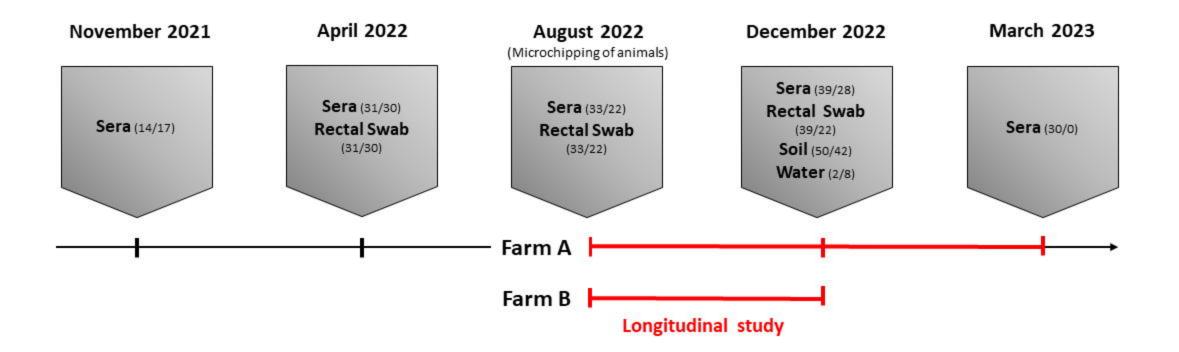
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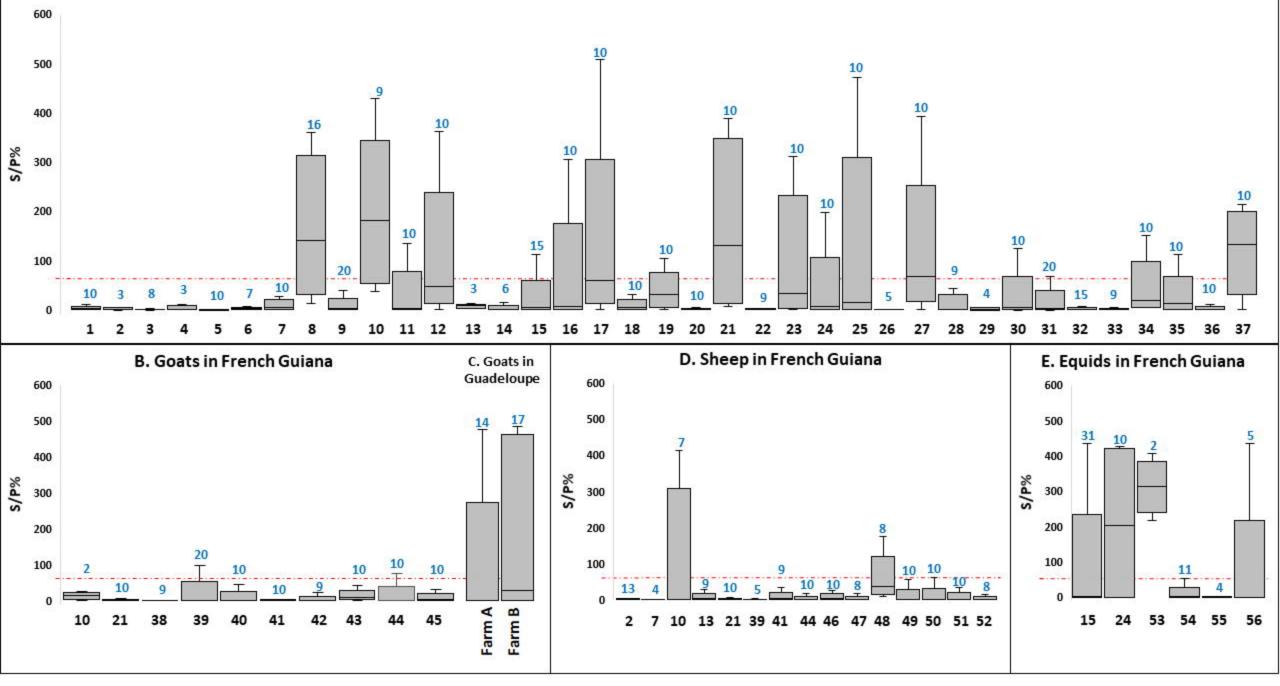
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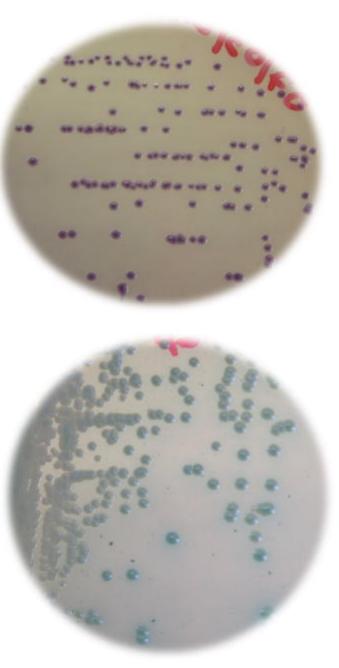


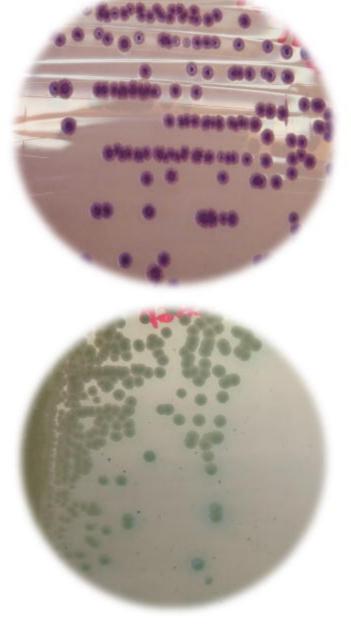


A. Cattle in French Guiana



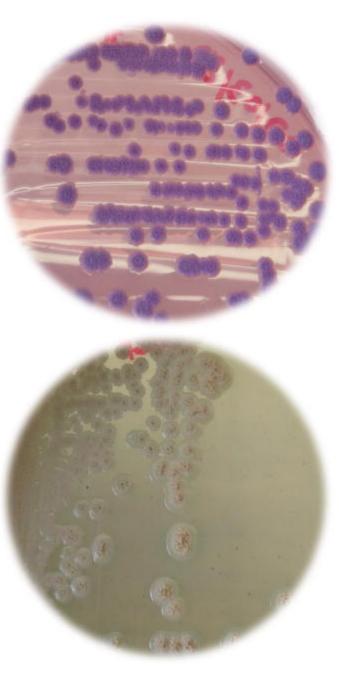
24h





48h

120h



А