KEEP ANTIBIOTICS WORKING

The Campaign to End Antibiotic Overuse

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First Study To Find MRSA ST 398 in Swine and Swine-farm Workers in the U.S.

Keep Antibiotics Working Urges Comprehensive Tests

Washington, D.C. – A pilot study published last week by researchers at the University of Iowa has found high prevalence of MRSA in swine (49%) and swine workers (45%) on a commercial confinement operation with farms scattered in Iowa and Illinois. The study, published in the PLoS ONE, v. 4(1); 2009, is the first to demonstrate the presence of the dangerous MRSA strain ST 398 in the U.S. The results add to the mounting body of evidence pointing to farm animals as reservoirs for antibiotic resistant strains of MRSA under circumstances in which the bacteria are passed to humans.

The strain of MRSA (ST 398) found in Iowa has been found on farms in Canada and the Netherlands, where the strain has been linked to serious human infections, including skin, wound, breast, and heart infections, as well as pneumonia. In Canada, the pigs carry not only the ST 398 pig strain but also USA 100, one of the most common strains identified with human illness and death in North America.

"Given the previous findings in Canada and Europe, and the large number of pigs imported from Canada into the U.S., we were not surprised by the results of this pilot study." said Steve Roach of Keep Antibiotics Working. "Now that we know that MRSA ST 398 is in the Midwest, it is time for our government to step up and put public health first by comprehensively testing US livestock for this strain of MRSA. Only then will we know the extent of the threat to our public health and food supply."

More testing will also allow scientists to pinpoint the genesis of the resistance traits on the farms, by looking for linkages between the use of penicillin, tetracycline and other antibiotics in farm animals and the presence of the resistant strain.

Robust U.S. data would add to the growing international consensus that massive use of antibiotics in farm animals systems is contributing to the increase in dangerous, costly infections resistant to treatment. The South Korean government recently responded to the crisis by banning the use of seven antibiotics in animal feed in Korea.

Seventy percent of all the antibiotics used in the United States are estimated to be used as feed additives for chickens, hogs, and beef cattle. Antibiotic feed additives are used without a prescription to help animals grow slightly faster – and to compensate for crowded, often unsanitary conditions on industrial-scale farms.

Legislation has been introduced in Congress that would require the FDA to take up the review of antibiotics such as penicillin and tetracycline to determine whether they can continue to be safely used as animal feed additives. The Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act (PAMTA) would help combat the antibiotic resistance crisis America is currently facing. The American Medical Association, the Infectious Diseases Society of America, and the American Academy of Pediatrics are among the more than 350 health, agriculture and other groups nationwide that have endorsed this legislation.

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NOTE: The study abstract is available here (for a pdf of the full article, please contact Angela Pauly at 202 478 6139):
http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19145257?ordinalpos=1&itool=EntrezSystem2.PEntrez.Pubmed.Pubmed_ResultsPanel.Pubmed_DefaultReportPanel.Pubmed_RVDocSum