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FACT SHEET

MRSA (ST 398): A New Resistant Disease From Animals

- Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) infections were responsible for almost 19,000 deaths in the United States in 2005. Until recently, MRSA was a disease that people picked up in hospitals. MRSA now often infects people who have no connection to hospitals. This infection pattern is known as “community acquired.”
- Recent research has shown that cattle and pigs can carry MRSA and that people who come into contact with farm animals are at greater risk for MRSA. The connection between MRSA and farm animals was first identified in the Netherlands in 2004 when a six-month-old girl was found to carry a new strain of MRSA ST 398 that came from her family's pigs.
- MRSA ST 398 has been shown to infect farm workers, their families, and veterinarians in the Netherlands. Since its discovery in 2004, this unique, animal-associated strain of MRSA now accounts for 20% of the human MRSA in the Netherlands. ST 398 causes serious human illness, including skin, wound, lung, and heart infections.
- MRSA ST 398 has now been found in U.S. pigs. A study published in January 2009 found MRSA ST 398 in 49% of swine and 45% of swine workers in an integrated operation with farms in Iowa and Illinois. This strain of MRSA is the same strain found in the Netherlands. The swine-associated MRSA differs from other strains of community-acquired MRSA because it is often resistant to drugs like minocycline, clindamycin, and Synercid given by doctors to treat MRSA.
- The overuse of antibiotics in animal operations leads to the development and spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria like MRSA. Many operators feed cattle, swine and poultry large quantities of antibiotics in low doses. MRSA ST 398 has been shown to be more common on operations that use antibiotics routinely.
- Resistant versions of *Escherichia coli*, *Clostridium difficile*, and *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, as well as MRSA, are found on retail meat.
- It has long been recognized that resistant *Salmonella*, *Campylobacter*, and *Enterococci* infections are linked to antibiotic use in animals.
- Federal government action on this serious human health problem has been lacking. There should be systematic testing of livestock for MRSA. Rural medical systems should be monitored to determine whether MRSA is leaving the farm and causing illness.
- FDA should review the safety of antibiotics used in animal feeds in light of the threat of antimicrobial resistance and remove from the market any products that are unsafe.