

New superbug that is spread by farm animals: Doctors raise concern over worrying resistance to antibiotics

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The new and potentially deadlier strains of E.coli and salmonella are spreading in cattle and pigs

Superbug versions of common food poisoning bacteria have been found in farm animals across Britain, government scientists warn.

The new and potentially deadlier strains of E.coli and salmonella are spreading in cattle and pigs, according to research to be unveiled today.

The bugs have developed a resistance to the antibiotics that are normally used to treat infections in both animals and humans.

As a result, doctors are finding it increasingly difficult to treat people who fall ill after coming into contact with the bugs through food or other routes.

One superbug, ESBL E.coli, was first found on one British farm in 2008. No measures were taken by the Government to try to contain the bug, which is now circulating on more than one in three – 37 per cent – of the country's dairy farms.

The incidence is much higher – 59 per cent – on farms which bought cattle from the original source farm, in Wales.

Similar strains of E.coli have been implicated in human illnesses such as urinary tract and blood infections, particularly among the elderly.

ESBL E. coli infections affect approximately 30,000 people each year, causing 2,500 cases of blood poisoning. Half of all blood poisoning cases prove fatal within 30 days.

The source of these infections is unclear, but it is thought only a small proportion – less than one per cent – is linked to food.

One expert from the Government's Health Protection Agency will tell a conference at the University of Warwick that further mutations of E.coli would have 'immense public health implications'. Separately, there are concerns about new forms of salmonella that appear to spreading through pigs and, potentially, pork.

A report presented to the conference warns 'such strains have now caused outbreaks and incidents of infection in at least ten European countries, with a death reported in at least one outbreak'.

In theory, if these bacteria are on food they can be killed with thorough cooking. However, food poisoning remains a huge problem with more than a million people falling ill every year.

The HPA's experts are calling for urgent measures to identify the level of spread of the antibiotic-resistant bugs and put in place control measures. Critics of intensive farming say emergence of the superbugs is a direct consequence of industrial-scale food production.

They argue that the use of antibiotics to treat infections in farm animals has led the bacteria that cause illness to mutate to develop a resistance.

When this bacteria gets into the human body, through contact with live animals or food, doctors find their antibiotic medicines – antimicrobial therapy – do not work.

The conference, called Antimicrobial Resistance: From Farm to Fork and Beyond, has been organised by the British Society for Antimicrobial Chemotherapy and is being held in association with the Veterinary Laboratories Agency. Papers presented to the conference make clear the bugs are far more widespread than originally thought.

In some cases, the necessary monitoring and safeguards to prevent spread are not in place.

In a keynote speech Professor Gary French, from St Thomas' and Guy's Hospital, London, will tell delegates: 'We are faced with the potential loss of antimicrobial therapy and effective national and international programmes of control to combat these problems are urgently needed.'

Richard Young, from the Soil Association, which promotes organic farming, said: 'There has been little public scrutiny of farm antibiotic use for over a decade, yet during that time we have seen farmers dramatically increase their use of antibiotics classified by the World Health Organisation as "critically important in human medicine".

'At the same time we have seen the development of several serious antibiotic resistant bugs in farm animals which are passing to humans on food and in other ways. It is high time that the Government took this problem seriously.'

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1314424/New-superbug-spread-farm-animals-Concern-resistance-antibiotics.html?ito=feeds-newsxml#ixzz10SdY3mKi>