

# Hogs Can Spread Disease to Workers

Hog farming has rapidly changed from small family owned barns to industrial barns with thousands of hogs. Size matters. You have a greater risk to get sick from hogs if you work with a large number of hogs each day.

It is sometimes hard to know if you are at risk because you may not know if the hogs are sick. Hogs can appear to be healthy but still be carrying disease.

## How are diseases spread from hogs to workers?

Bacteria, viruses and other types of germs from hogs can cause illness. Germs from hogs can get into your body in the following ways:

- you can breathe in germs
- you can swallow germs
- through an open sore

Germs that cannot be seen with the naked eye may be able to get into your lungs. The dust particles in hog barns and waste can contain feces, urine, moulds, bacteria and viruses. When you breathe in the dusty air, you breathe in everything in that air. The animal matter and germs in the air can be carried into the lungs and cause health problems. For example, the swine flu (H<sub>1</sub>N<sub>1</sub>) virus can be spread from hogs to workers in this way. Symptoms may include fever, headache, cough, muscle aches and pain, runny nose and exhaustion.

Germs can also get into your body by being swallowed. *Salmonella* and other types of bacteria can be spread to workers during the slaughter of infected hogs or the handling of animal wastes. Germs from the animals may also get into your food if you eat in your work area or if you do not wash your hands before eating. Germs in food can cause fever, stomach ache or loose stools.

The skin is a good protective shield for the

body. This shield can be broken by scratches or cuts that let germs get into your body which can make you sick.

## Antibiotic overuse in hogs

The use of antibiotics has greatly increased over the years. Animal producers use the same antibiotics for hogs that are used for people. Using antibiotics to treat sick pigs is an important part of helping sick hogs become well. However, small amounts of antibiotics are also now often routinely fed to hogs that are not sick just to get them bigger more quickly.

Using small amounts of antibiotics routinely kills most germs, but some survive and continue to change until antibiotics can no longer defeat these germs. These antibiotic resistant germs can be passed from hogs to workers. Some of our current antibiotics that we commonly use for people are no longer able to kill the resistant germs.

## Workers at the most risk are

- workers in hog barns
- slaughterhouse workers
- veterinarians and animal control workers
- laboratory workers

## Workers are at the most risk to get sick when they have contact with

- hog tissues or body fluids during
  - feeding
  - assistance with birthing
  - slaughter
  - carcass disposal
- hog waste (manure, urine) during
  - solid and liquid waste handling
  - applying wastes to land
  - pen cleaning - If a worker is hosing down a barn and splashing water the risk of exposure to germs would be greater than when cleaning a barn using a shovel.



- ✓ shower and change clothing after working with manure or handling animals
- ✓ clean and protect wounds promptly
- ✓ avoid eating, drinking, chewing gum, smoking, nail biting in barns
- ✓ report your health and safety concerns to your supervisor, health and safety committee, or worker representative
- ✓ see a doctor if you become ill, particularly with fever or other signs of infection. Tell them if you think it may be work related. Check if your employer is covered by workers compensation benefits.

## How will I know if I am sick from working with hogs?

See a doctor if you have a fever or other signs of infection.

When you see your doctor, it is important to tell that you work in the hog industry and the type of work you do.

## What can employers do?

- ✓ involve workers in identifying and addressing risks to their health
- ✓ establish policies and procedures to prevent exposures to diseases carried by hogs
- ✓ train workers about potential diseases and how to prevent exposures
- ✓ provide convenient and accessible hand washing facilities
- ✓ ensure well-planned cleaning routines to reduce exposures to hog waste and fluids
- ✓ provide appropriate protective wear for workers (such as masks, gloves, protective eye wear and washable rubber boots). Always provide gloves for workers in direct contact with body fluids. Sometimes full arm plastic protection is needed.

## What can workers do?

- ✓ wash hands thoroughly and frequently
- ✓ wear personal protective equipment such as masks, gloves, protective eye wear and rubber boots to reduce contact with animal tissue and wastes

## What can communities do?

Contact your elected officials and ask them to pass laws that

1. a) Ban the use of antibiotics as growth promoters in hogs.  
b) Require that antibiotics only be given to sick hogs by prescription.
2. Require clear labeling so that you can identify antibiotic free pork meat.

## Need more information?

MFL Occupational Health Centre  
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Website: [www.mflohc.mb.ca](http://www.mflohc.mb.ca)

Workplace Safety & Health Branch  
200 - 401 York Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 0P8  
Phone: 204-945-3446  
Fax: 204-948-2209  
Toll free: 1-800-282-8069  
Website: [www.gov.mb.ca/labour/safety](http://www.gov.mb.ca/labour/safety)

Manitoba Eco-Network  
303 Portage Avenue  
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