

# How Hogs Spread Disease to Workers

Working in the hog production and processing industry can put workers at risk for a number of health problems. One of the risks is the spread of disease from hogs to humans.

## Why are workers at risk?

Some animal diseases can be spread from animals to humans. This can happen when a worker comes into contact with an infected animal or animal matter (such as manure or urine) and then gets some of the infectious germs into the worker's own system.

The type of job you have or the activities you do in your job may increase your risk.

**Jobs at greatest risk** for getting diseases from hogs are

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

You may be at risk for disease if your **work activities** include

- contact with hog waste (manure, urine) during
  - pen cleaning
  - solid and liquid waste handling
  - applying wastes to land
- contact with hog tissues or body fluids during
  - carcass disposal
  - feeding
  - assistance with birthing
  - slaughter

Your risk for disease also increases if you work with large numbers of hogs. For example, some workers come into contact

with hundreds or thousands of hogs each day. When working with hogs, it is sometimes hard to know what your risk is because you may not know which hogs have infections. Hogs can appear to be healthy but may still be carrying disease.

## How are diseases spread from hogs to workers?

Bacteria, viruses and other types of germs can cause illness. When germs from infected hogs get into humans, the humans may get sick. Germs can get into your body in three ways

- you can breathe in germs
- you can swallow germs
- germs can enter 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 facilities and waste can contain feces, urine, moulds, bacteria and viruses. When you breathe in the dusty air, you breathe in everything in that air. This way the animal matter and germs in the air can be carried into the lungs and cause health problems. For example, the *swine influenza* ("flu") virus can be spread from hogs to humans 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. For example, the germs from the animals may 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 symptoms such as 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. These scratches and cuts can be another way for germs to get into your body.

### Antibiotic use in hogs

Antibiotics are used in large-scale hog production to

- prevent illness in the animals
- cure sick animals
- increase the chances that the hog will live longer

The use of antibiotics has greatly increased over the years. Animal producers use the same antibiotics for hogs that are used for people. The routine use of antibiotics can contribute to the development of resistant bacteria. Resistant bacteria are less likely to be killed by antibiotics. These germs can then be passed from hogs to workers.

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

If you are sick or are concerned about any symptoms you have you should see your doctor. See a doctor if you have a fever or other signs of infection.

When you see your doctor, it is important to tell them that you work in the hog industry and the type of work you do. Even if your symptoms are not related to your job, it is important that your doctor knows what type of work you do.

### What can employers do?

Employers can make your workplace safer in these ways

- ✓ involve workers in identifying and addressing risks to their health
- ✓ establish policies and procedures to prevent exposures to diseases carried by hogs
- ✓ ensure well-planned cleaning routines to reduce exposures to hog waste and fluids
- ✓ train workers about potential diseases and how to prevent exposures

- ✓ provide appropriate protective wear for workers (such as masks, gloves, protective eye wear and rubber boots)
- ✓ provide convenient and accessible hand washing facilities
- ✓ avoid the overuse of animal drugs (eg. antibiotics)

### What can you do?

- ✓ report your workplace health and safety concerns to your supervisor, health and safety committee, or worker representative
- ✓ wash hands thoroughly and frequently
- ✓ shower and change clothing after working with manure or handling animals
- ✓ clean and protect wounds promptly
- ✓ wear personal protective equipment such as masks, gloves, protective eye wear and rubber boots to reduce contact with animal tissue and wastes
- ✓ 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. You may be eligible for benefits.

### Need more information?

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or

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