



**LEFT:**  
Scott Weese

**MRSA does not cause symptoms in pigs, and carriers normally appear healthy.**

however, producers have been falling ill with an MRSA strain found in pork, leading Weese to wonder if producer illness will become an emerging problem here.

At this point, researchers know MRSA can be caused in part by antibiotic use, but they don't know the definite cause or how it spreads

through herds. In meat, MRSA can be killed by proper cooking and sanitation procedures, which will aid in preventing human illness.

Although MRSA has been found in five to 10 per cent of pork being marketed on store shelves, in most cases the levels in the meat are too low to cause illness. Researchers aim to find out where MRSA enters the food chain and how to limit it on the farm and at the slaughterhouse.

Younger pigs are more likely to carry the MRSA strain than older pigs, so by slaughter age most pigs are no longer carriers. Because MRSA is not always present at the time of slaughter, Weese and his team wonder where else the MRSA is being introduced. A further complication is that MRSA does not cause symptoms in pigs, and carriers normally appear healthy.

A test is available to discover if pigs are infected with MRSA but, at this point, researchers are not recommending large-scale testing of animals because control measures are not yet known. "If a way to stop the spread is found, testing may become more common," says Weese.

Until that time, researchers believe good hygiene to be the best preventative measure against the producer illness seen in Europe. This includes proper hand washing and having a shower-in, shower-out facility.

Because MRSA can be killed by proper cooking and use of routine disinfectants, and because only low levels have been found in raw meat, the risk of a person contracting MRSA through eating meat is believed to be low. However, it is resistant to certain antibiotics, posing a challenge for treatment.

Weese hopes to find control measures for MRSA at both the farm level and the processing level in the future, but more time is needed to achieve that goal. **■**

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## Searching for answers to how MRSA enters the food chain

**Researchers at the Ontario Veterinary College are looking to limit MRSA on the farm and at the slaughterhouse, even though the risk to humans in North America is low**

**M**ethicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) has been found in many animals and two per cent of people, but it seems most common in pigs.

Scott Weese and his colleagues at the Ontario Veterinary College have found MRSA on swine farms and in pork over the last few years. Since research is

BY  
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relatively new, it is unknown how long the organisms have been present, or what the implications are for people.

It is known, however, that the MRSA strain currently affecting our pork is different from the MRSA strain affecting North American people.

"In North America, there are not many illnesses caused by the pig strain," says Weese. In Europe,