

Streptococcus suis

Background Information

Streptococcus suis is a bacterium that causes disease in pigs. It very occasionally causes a severe infection in humans, particularly in people who work with pigs or handle infected pork.

Organism

Streptococcus suis

Incidence and Transmission

Streptococcus suis infection in humans is very rare, with only one or two cases in the UK each year. It is thought that most at risk are those with suppressed immune systems.

It is generally spread from pigs to humans by direct contact, with the bacteria entering the body through cuts or abrasions in the skin. Occasionally other animals, including horses and cows, may be infected and theoretically may pass the disease to humans. It is also possible that the bacteria may spread in the air and be inhaled, but very close contact with pigs or pig products is needed.

Streptococcus suis is not generally spread from person to person.

Occupations and processes where *Streptococcus suis* may present a risk

Occupational exposure to *Streptococcus suis* may occur in those who:

- are in contact with infected pigs; or
- work with materials or products from infected pigs.

Occupations where there may be a risk of occupationally acquired *Streptococcus suis* infection include:

- pig farmers;
- abattoir workers, meat processing plant workers and butchers; and
- veterinary surgeons.

Clinical Information

The incubation period is from a few hours to several days.

Symptoms are usually flu-like initially, although they often progress to meningitis, septicaemia or endocarditis (infection of heart valves). The disease may progress to Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS), which often leads to multiple organ failure and subsequently death.

Anyone with flu-like symptoms who may have been in contact with infected pigs or their products should seek immediate medical attention. Treatment with penicillin is effective if given early.

Control

The following control measures reduce the risk of infection:

- Good occupational hygiene practices should be followed, especially washing with warm water and soap.
- Cuts and abrasions should be covered with waterproof plasters.
- A suitable disinfectant should be used.
- Anyone who knows they are immunosuppressed and who works with pigs should inform their manager.

Further Information

[Public Health England – Streptococcus suis](#)