

A Note on *Streptococcus suis* Infection Lin Teng

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Commentary

Streptococcus suis infection is a zoonotic disease caused by the *Streptococcus suis* bacterium. In Hong Kong, it is a notifiable infectious disease. Meningitis is the most common complication of the disease, which is characterised by fever, headache, and vomiting. It can also cause skin bleeding and, in rare cases, sepsis, endocarditis, arthritis, bronchopneumonia, and toxic shock syndrome. Deafness is a common complication of *Streptococcus suis* infection, and it is likely to be permanent.

Transmission mode

Infection with *Streptococcus suis* is a common disease in pigs. The bacterium is carried in pigs' upper respiratory tracts and spreads between pigs via nose-to-nose contact or aerosol over short distances. Aside from pigs (including wild boars), it can occasionally be found in horses, dogs, cats, and birds.

Adults are the most commonly infected with *Streptococcus suis*. It is spread through direct contact and is frequently associated with skin wounds from handling infected pigs or other animals, raw pork, and other pig products. However, it can also be transmitted through ingestion or mucous membranes.

Groups at high risk

Pig breeders, abattoir workers, meat processing and transport workers, butchers, and cooks are among those at risk. Immunocompromised people, such as those who have had their spleen removed, as well as those with diabetes, cancer, and alcoholism, are at a higher risk of infection.

Incubation time

Time spans from a few hours to two weeks.

Management

Antibiotics can be used to treat *Streptococcus suis* infection.

Prevention

There is no human vaccine against *Streptococcus suis*. To reduce the risk of infection, the general public should take the following precautions:

Keep good personal hygiene: Hand hygiene should be practised on a regular basis, especially before touching the mouth, nose, or eyes. Hands should be washed with liquid soap and water and rubbed for at least 20 seconds. Then, rinse with water and dry with a paper towel or hand dryer. Hand hygiene with 70 to 80

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percent alcohol-based hand rub is an effective alternative if hand washing facilities are not available or when hands are not visibly soiled.

- Contact with pigs (including wild boars) and other animals should be avoided. Otherwise, wash hands as soon as possible after contact with liquid soap and water.
- Avoid injury by wearing gloves when handling pigs or raw pork.
- Before handling raw pork, properly cover wounds with waterproof adhesive dressings.

Keep good food hygiene: To prevent foodborne diseases, always follow the "5 Keys to Food Safety" when handling food (including pork), which are:

- Choose (choose safe raw materials)
- Clean (keep hands and utensils clean)
- Separate (separate raw and cooked food)
- Cook (cook thoroughly) and
- Safe Temperature (keep food at safe temperature)
- Food should be purchased from hygienic and trustworthy sources. Do not support illegal hawkers.
- Raw pork should be kept in tightly sealed containers and refrigerated at 4°C or lower.
- Raw and cooked pork should be handled and stored separately.
- Surfaces, utensils, and equipment in contact with raw pork should be thoroughly cleaned.
- Pork should be thoroughly cooked before eating.