

Study Could Link Dogs to Human Infections

Researchers suspect dogs and cats may play a role in the increase of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Posted: August 4, 2007, 5 a.m. EST

Researchers suspect that a recent rise in antibiotic-resistant bacteria infections in the general population is stemming from something other than a hospital visit where most of these infections crop up.

“We used to think of these antibiotic-resistant infections as a healthcare issue that appeared in post-operative or long-term patients,” said Stephanie Kottler, a resident at the Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital at the University of Missouri-Columbia. “However, we have been seeing more of these infections that have been acquired throughout the general population, or ‘community acquired’ infections. It’s important to know what environmental factors might be encouraging or prolonging these infections.”

Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can live in the nose or on the skin of a human or pet without producing symptoms. The bacteria, however, become dangerous when entering the body through a cut or puncture, producing a serious infection, such as pneumonia.

Kottler suspects dogs and cats might play a role in the increase of community infections in households.

In some cases, people may be passing a *Staphylococcus aureus* bacterium to their pet, which then passes it back to the person causing a potentially fatal infection in the human, Kottler said.

So far, they have collected about 500 nasal swabs from human healthcare workers, veterinary healthcare workers and the general population as well as anal and nasal swabs from dogs and cats.

Published results aren’t expected until next spring, although analysis of the results could begin as early as this fall.