



ThePigSite Latest News *Monday, October 06, 2008*

## **Pig Workers Contract Heart Disease from Abattoir**

**AUSTRALIA - Two piggery workers have survived a potentially deadly disease of the heart valves after contracting *Strep suis* from animals bound for the abattoir.**

[Adelaide Now](#) reports that doctors at Canberra Hospital have treated a 46-year-old woman and a 58-year-old man, both from New South Wales, for fevers, sweating and severe weight loss caused by endocarditis, a serious condition where bacteria settle on the valves of the heart and spread infection throughout the body.

The woman required a heart valve replacement to survive.

The bacterium, called *Streptococcus suis*, is common in pigs and can be caught by humans through contact with live or dead pigs, though the exact mechanism for transmission is unknown.

It has caused large-scale death among humans, most recently in 2005 when 215 Chinese butchers and meat processors became infected, killing more than half.

Only two cases have been reported in Australia, the first in 1993 and a second in April last year, when a 41-year-old Melbourne meat processor developed toxic shock syndrome from the bug.

Canberra Hospital infectious diseases physician, Dr Karina Kennedy, said with four reported cases, the strain is emerging as a serious hazard for Australian piggery workers.

"These cases show that it is an occupational hazard in Australian piggeries, with potential public health, animal health and medico-legal implications," Dr Kennedy wrote in the latest *Medical Journal of Australia*.

The journal has detailed the latest cases, revealing that the woman developed fatigue and anorexia, and lost 20 kilograms in the months before she was diagnosed in October 2006, and required an operation to replace her severely damaged aortic valve.

The man, who was from the same unnamed town, presented to the hospital in January this year with headache, fevers, neck stiffness and confusion, and recovered after drug treatment.





Paul Seale, a professor of clinical pharmacology at the University of Sydney, said the cases should be a wake-call for health authorities.

"On the back of this we need occupational health and safety experts to go into these piggeries and rigorously examine ways in which the workers can be better protected from this exposure before it happens again," Professor Seale said.

*ThePigSite News Desk*

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