

Possible pet-human bacteria link studied

March 22 2006

Scientists at an international conference in Atlanta say they're investigating a possible link between antibiotic resistance in pets and pet owners.

The developing resistance of certain bacteria to specific antibiotics has been an important human health problem, The New York Times reported Wednesday, but now the problem is occurring in dogs and cats.

U.S., Canadian and European scientists attending the International Conference on Emerging Infectious Diseases are specifically concerned about the bacterium *Staphylococcus aureus*, the most common cause of staphylococcal infections among people.

The same genetic strains of *S. aureus* have been turning up in both human and animal cases, suggesting a connection, scientists told the Times said.

Dr. Nina Morano of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention told reporters the problem is serious enough to cause her agency to add questions about exposure to dogs, cats and other pets in large studies concerning human staphylococcal infections.

After *S. aureus* among humans developed resistance to penicillin many years ago, doctors started prescribing another antibiotic, methicillin. But *S. aureus* infections soon became resistant to methicillin and now the methicillin-resistant bacterium is being found in dogs, cats and horses.

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Citation: Possible pet-human bacteria link studied (2006, March 22) retrieved 20 April 2024
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