

Inadequate infection control by vets widespread

May 13 2013



Almost half of veterinarians contract an infection from animals during their career.

The infection control practices of veterinarians are inadequate with almost 50 percent of vets contracting infections from animals during their career, research led by the University of Sydney has found.

"There is an urgent need for our profession to better educate vets about protecting themselves, and by extension the general public, against contracting infection from animals," said Dr Navneet Dhand, from the University's Faculty of [Veterinary Science](#).

"Not using appropriate protection when necessary is just like having unprotected sex with a stranger and thinking that it will be alright," Dr Dhand said.

Dr Dhand is Principal Investigator of the research published in *Preventive Veterinary Medicine* today.

The survey found that 44.9 percent of vets have contracted infections from animals during their professional lives.

The study was conducted to determine vets' perception of risk of contracting a disease from the animals they treat, the measures they use to protect themselves and the factors that influence their adoption of those measures.

The survey was completed by 344 veterinarians attending an Australian Veterinary Association Conference and conducted by Karen Dowd, a master's student in the Veterinary Public Health Management course at the University.

It also found that:

- about 60 percent of workplaces do not make adequate use of national industry standard [infection control](#) kits designed to protect staff against infection
- 34.8 percent did not have isolation units for animals with contagious or known [infectious diseases](#)
- 21.1 percent did not have staff eating areas separate from the

animals.

Although more than 75 percent of vets used adequate protection (eg masks, gowns, gloves) to prevent infection while performing post-mortems, dental procedures and surgery, 60 to 70 percent did not use adequate protection when treating animals with signs of respiratory and neurological disease and 40 to 50 percent did not use adequate protection when treating animals with signs of gastrointestinal and dermatological disease.

"The results of the study are concerning. Our profession appears to have a complacent attitude towards the use of personal protection," Dr Dhand said.

"It is worth remembering that zoonotic (contracted from animals) diseases, such as equine Hendra virus and avian influenza represent 75 percent of all emerging infectious diseases for humans."

"Given they spend much of their professional lives working with sick animals, vets are likely to be among the first people to encounter [animals](#) infected with zoonotic pathogens. In that sense their vigilance has implications not only for their own health but also the health and safety of their employees and clients and for that of the wider community."

The study found that veterinarians' perceptions and workplace policies and culture substantially influence their use of personal protective equipment, with uptake often well below the minimal levels recommended by the national industry.

Some of the factors that made vets more likely to use preventive measures included working in non-private practice, an awareness of biosecurity guidelines and belief that their use would decrease their liability in the case of legal action.

"Given an estimated 80 percent of surveyed vets worked in private practice their lack of awareness underlines the need to improve the quality of decision making by veterinarians regarding the use of preventive measures," Dr Dhand said.

More information: [www.journals.elsevier.com/prev ... veterinary-medicine/](http://www.journals.elsevier.com/prev...veterinary-medicine/)

Provided by University of Sydney

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