

Retail meat linked to urinary tract infections: Strong new evidence

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Chicken sold in supermarkets, restaurants and other outlets may place young women at risk of urinary tract infections (UTI), McGill researcher Ameet Manges has discovered. Samples taken in the Montreal area between 2005 and 2007, in collaboration with the Public Health Agency of Canada and the University of Guelph, provide strong new evidence that *E. coli* (*Escherichia coli*) bacteria originating from these food sources can cause common urinary tract infections.

Eating contaminated meat or food does not directly lead to a UTI. While some *E. coli* such as O157:H7 can cause serious intestinal disease, these *E. coli* [bacteria](#) can live in the [intestine](#) without causing problems. In women however, the bacteria can travel from the anus to the vagina and [urethra](#) during sex, which can lead to the infection.

The research team is also investigating whether livestock may be passing antimicrobial-resistant bacteria on to humans. This is due to the use of antibiotics to treat or prevent disease in the animals and to enhance their growth, which may lead them to develop resistance to the medication. When animals are slaughtered and their meat is processed for sale, the meat can be contaminated with these bacteria.

“These studies might open the door to discussions with policymakers,” Manges said, “about how antibiotics are used in agriculture in Canada. It’s certainly something we need to continue studying”.

The public should not be alarmed. Manges advises that consumers should

cook meat thoroughly and prevent contamination of other foods in the kitchen. Although some infections caused by these *E. coli* are resistant to some antibiotics, the infections can still be treated. Manges hopes that understanding how these bacteria are transmitted will help reduce infections. She also hopes more attention will be focused on how meat is produced in Canada. Her research is part of a broader study concerning food safety and is financed through funding by the Government of Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, in collaboration with the Laboratory for Foodborne Zoonoses, specifically the Canadian Integrated Program for Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance, and also the Division de l'inspection des aliments, Ville de Montréal.

More information: www.cdc.gov/eid/content/16/1/88.htm

Provided by McGill University

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