

# MRSA thrives even without antibiotics

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The MRSA bacterium, which is resistant to antibiotics, has spread rapidly in the past few years on pig farms. Extensive use of antibiotics is thought to help it spread, but reducing the use of antibiotics is not enough to eliminate MRSA on pig farms, says Els Broens in her doctoral thesis.

At the beginning of 2007 the incidence of MRSA on pig farms stood at 30 percent, but by the end of 2008 it had gone up to 75 percent, Brons reports. Large pig farms (with more than 500 sows) were particularly likely to be MRSA positive. The [bacterium](#) is transported from farm to farm in [livestock](#) trucks. Many pigs also become infected on the way to the abattoir, because the MRSA bacterium is present in other pigs in the truck. Pig farmers and abattoir workers can become infected with the bacterium too, if they come into contact with live pigs. Abattoir staff who only work with dead pigs do not run any risk, says to Broens.

In order to cut the transmission of [MRSA](#) from pigs to humans, the bacterium needs to be combatted at source: on the farm. Only reducing antibiotic use will not solve the problem says Broens, because the [resistant bacteria](#) can spread and thrive among pigs that have not had any antibiotics. Besides reducing [antibiotic use](#), Broens argues for hygiene measures in order to prevent the spread of resistant bacteria on and between pig farms. This requires a joint plan by farmers, politicians, supermarkets and vets, says the Wageningen University PhD candidate.

Els Broens received her PhD on 28 October from Mart de Jong, professor of Quantitative Veterinary Epidemiology at Wageningen

University.

Provided by Wageningen University

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