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Zoonosis Facts

Jill Webster

S. Christian Mariger

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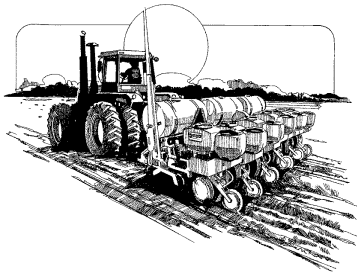
Utah State University Extension

Agricultural Health and Safety
Fact Sheet AHS-08

Zoonosis Facts



Jill Webster Ph.D.,
S. Christian Mariger, Graduate Assistant
Agricultural Systems Technology and Education

Zoonosis is defined as "an infectious disease transmissible under natural conditions between vertebrate animals and human beings" (Mast 95). There are more than 150 diseases recognized under the umbrella of zoonosis. Some of the better known examples include: anthrax, bursilosis, hunta virus, bubonic plage, hemoragic fevers like ebola, rabies, and even AIDS. The world's most significant epidemic (the 1919 pandemic) was believed to have originated in swine near Fort Riley Kansas in 1917. This influenza out break accounted for more casualties to combatants and civil populations than bullets bombs, and poison gas combined did in the first world war. Though otherwise healthy people seldom die of the flu, these days it is important to understand the mechanisms of infection, and prevention.

In addition to infectious diseases, parasites are also a concern for those who have close contact with animals. Hookworms, roundworms, and tapeworms are common in both domestic animals and wildlife. They are also transmissible to humans. Parasites are usually passed through contact with fecal matter, where the eggs are deposited. However transmission can occur even with out direct contact with animal waste.

Several factors exist that promote zoonotic infection in an agricultural setting.

- Frequent contact with domestic animals
- Overlap with wildlife habitat
- Intensive livestock production
- Poor animal sanitation
- Poor personal hygiene

Prevention is the key to the control of zoonotic disease. Good house keeping is important to preventing transmission and infection. Keep work areas clean and free of animal waste and soiled bedding materials. When cleaning dusty areas were rodent, bird, or livestock droppings might be found, always wear a dust mask and use a solution of bleach and water to reduce dustiness and help sterilize the area. Bleach solutions can also be used to clean boots, buckets tools, and clothing that are contaminated with manure.

Vaccination also offers an opportunity to break the cycle of infection and transmission. Not only will a regular vaccination program reduce losses, it will help protect the health of the human population as well. Livestock and pets should always have the appropriate inoculations.

Pest control is yet another way to reduce exposure to potentially lethal diseases. Through and prompt attention to insect and vertebrate infestations, animal to animal, and animal to human transmission can be reduced.

Frequent hand washing, especially after working with animals, is yet another practice that

helps in the prevention of zoonotic disease. Indirect transfer of contaminants to food or drink, are often the result of a failure to wash hands.

Pertinent Literature

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