A mechanistic model for spread of livestock-associated methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (LA-MRSA) within a pig herd

Before an efficient control strategy for livestock-associated methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus (LA-MRSA) in pigs can be decided upon, it is necessary to obtain a better understanding of how LA-MRSA spreads and persists within a pig herd, once it is introduced. We here present a mechanistic stochastic discrete-event simulation model for spread of LA-MRSA within a farrow-to-finish sow herd to aid in this. The model was individual-based and included three different disease compartments: susceptible, intermittent or persistent shedder of MRSA. The model was used for studying transmission dynamics and within-farm prevalence after different introductions of LA-MRSA into a farm. The spread of LA-MRSA throughout the farm mainly followed the movement of pigs. After spread of LA-MRSA had reached equilibrium, the prevalence of LA-MRSA shedders was predicted to be highest in the farrowing unit, independent of how LA-MRSA was introduced. LA-MRSA took longer to spread to the whole herd if introduced in the finisher stable, rather than by gilts in the mating stable. The more LA-MRSA positive animals introduced, the shorter time before the prevalence in the herd stabilised. Introduction of a low number of intermittently shedding pigs was predicted to frequently result in LA-MRSA fading out. The model is a potential decision support tool for assessments of short and long term consequences of proposed intervention strategies or surveillance options for LA-MRSA within pig herds.

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