What is MRSA?
MRSA is a type of bacteria that is resistant to certain antibiotics.

Is MRSA a health risk for myself or my family?
MRSA does not usually cause illness in healthy people or animals. MRSA can live in the nose and on the skin of people and animals without causing any infection. In some people and animals MRSA may cause a localized skin infection. However if a person or animal has a compromised immune system due to old age, recent surgery, cancer etc. exposure to MRSA could threaten their health.

Can animals carry MRSA?
Domestic animals (e.g., cats, dogs, horses), livestock (e.g., cattle, pigs) and wild animals have been found to carry MRSA.

How is MRSA transmitted to people and animals?
Direct skin-to-skin contact is the most common way MRSA is transmitted. MRSA is most commonly transmitted from person-to-person in the community (community associated infection) or patient-to-patient in the health care setting (hospital acquired infection).

What are the symptoms of MRSA in people and animals?
MRSA commonly causes skin infections or wound infections.

Why has MRSA in pigs received so much attention in the media lately?
Several recent reports describing MRSA in swine and retail meats have heightened the public’s concern over the risk of contracting MRSA from pigs and pork products. MRSA found in livestock is different from the community associated MRSA or hospital acquired infections – which are responsible for the majority of MRSA infections seen in humans. The role of animals in the transmission of MRSA is not well known.

Does contact with pigs or eating pork products represent a health risk to myself or my family?
Humans may acquire MRSA through coming in contact with pigs carrying MRSA. However, most human infections are community associated or hospital acquired infections. The CDC has determined that the MRSA linked with swine is not implicated in the increase in community associated MRSA that has been seen in the US over recent years. Research in the Netherlands and Canada has indicated that individuals in close contact with swine, such as swine farm workers, may be at increased risk of exposure to infection with MRSA from colonized swine. However, only a small number of cases of human infections have been reported. There are also recent reports that MRSA can be isolated from pork. Dutch authorities have assessed foodborne transmission of MRSA from pork to be of negligible importance in the spread of MRSA to the human population. Further research is underway to assess the public health impact of MRSA in swine and retail pork products in the US.

How can I reduce the risk of infection?
- Practice good personal hygiene – regular hand washing with soap and water, particularly after contact with animals and handling raw meat products.
- Follow proper guidelines for the handling of meat to reduce the potential for foodborne illness – refrigerate, separate, and cook thoroughly.
- Pay attention to existing and new skin wounds – clean and cover with bandages until healed.
- Seek medical attention if concerned about any symptoms of illness or signs of infection develop.

This fact sheet is meant to provide basic information. For specific health concerns please contact your physician or veterinarian. Updated 2009.