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Water risks

All pigs drink water several times a day. This makes the water supply a very effective vehicle for administering certain medicines but also for spreading infection.

Sources of contamination

The original water supply can be contaminated, usually by faecal material but sometimes by wild birds. A good example of this occurred in Minnesota in the 1950s and 1960s. Turkeys reared on the range had access to ponds and lakes which had become contaminated with the droppings of wild waterfowl. These turkeys often experienced influenza and the problem disappeared when they were housed and put on to a different water supply. In some countries we are moving pig production outdoors, so this problem could equally apply to wild boars.

There have been various instances of juices seeping out from a carcase pit and contaminating the subterranean water supply that the farm relied on. This then carries disease into healthy animals. In poultry this has occurred in Africa with *E. coli* and *Salmonella enteritidis* in Eastern Europe.

Sometimes another animal is infected by drinking contaminated water and then takes the infection into the pig herd. Typically such animals include rats, mice and lizards. As a young veterinarian I knew an old sow in a sty who would remain motionless for hours with her lower jaw on top of the wall with her mouth wide open. Then, as a mouse or rat ran along the wall, chomp – some more free protein! Just think of the infections those mice and rats could have been carrying!

Infection can also be spread within a house, for example nasal discharge from infected pigs contaminating water in a drinker bowl or trough, which then infects other pigs.

Control of disease spread via the water

The original source of water is the first point of control. Avoid using pond, lake or river water. If you have to use such water then always treat it, for example by chlorination.

Then you need to check how the water gets from its source to your pigs and identify any input points where contamination could occur. Such points include damaged pipes. However the more likely points are site storage tanks and header tanks, both of which, if their covers are not properly fixed, can have their water contaminated by faecal material (wild birds, rats, mice, lizards) and by animals that fall into the tanks, die and decompose. Remember rats and cats carry *Pasteurella* Spp., many animals carry *Salmonella* Spp. and wild birds can carry various avian pathogens.

So, a key part of any biosecurity programme is to ensure that the lids on such tanks are complete and always secured.

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