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The causal agent

Melioidosis is a chronic bacterial infection caused by the bacterium *Burkholderia pseudomallei*, which occurs in tropical and subtropical countries. Man can become infected from contact with infected meat or faeces from infected pigs. Situations have occurred when man and pigs have been infected by a common source.

B. pseudomallei is a short Gram positive rod shaped bacterium. It does not form spores. Melioidosis in man can be fatal and appears as a pneumonia/septicaemia or as chronic suppurative nodules in the skin, lymph nodes and skeleton. Human mortality is 20-50%, irrespective of whether treatment is given.

B. pseudomallei is present in the water and soil in tropical and subtropical areas and can infect pigs when their water supplies become contaminated or when they consume contaminated food. Several disinfectants are effective against *B. pseudomallei*.

Clinical signs

This disease is often clinically inapparent. Raised body temperature can persist for four days. An unsteady gait, lameness, weakness, mild nasal discharge and subcutaneous limb swelling may be seen. In sows, abortions and uterine discharges have been reported.

Pathology

Lesions are large lung abscesses filled with creamy or caseous yellow-green pus. Similar abscesses can be seen in the liver, spleen and kidneys and in mesenteric and subcutaneous lymph nodes.

Diagnosis and control

Melioidosis should be considered in pigs with prolonged raised rectal temperatures and an unsteady gait associated with subcutaneous limb oedema. Often diagnosis is made on the basis of the abscess type previously described at slaughter. Diagnosis can be confirmed by the isolation of *B. pseudomallei* from lesions.

Only some antibiotics are effective, for example, certain cephalosporins and amoxicillin: clavulanic acid. Prevention centres around the use of clean or chlorinated water and preventing access to contaminated soil.

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