

Practicing veterinarians can play a role in determining new diseases in pigs

What is this research about?

Surveillance programs can provide an early warning about an emerging disease. A surveillance system is an organized way of collecting disease information to detect changes in the disease patterns of a population.

Practicing veterinarians are in close contact with swine livestock (pigs) and producers. A surveillance system with veterinarians who work with pigs may help detect a new disease problem early in the pig population. Early detection is important to contain or eliminate disease. This can help to maintain a healthy and profitable pig population. A side benefit of a surveillance program might be improved public health if an emerging disease could infect humans.

What you need to know:

Veterinarians that work with pigs can play an important role in detecting outbreaks of disease in pig populations. As part of a surveillance program, veterinarians shared information about diseases in the pigs they treated. The researchers evaluated this surveillance program.

The researchers found that veterinarians were willing to participate in a surveillance program, and that useful data were produced. Recommendations to improve the surveillance program included better communication with veterinarians, and more user-friendly recording systems.

How can you use this research?

Public health officials working in zoonotic disease and surveillance can learn about the potential for veterinary-based surveillance systems from this research.

Veterinarians can use this research to understand their potential role in detecting new diseases of public health concern.

What did the researchers do?

A 12 month pilot surveillance program in Ontario's swine industry was evaluated.

The researchers wanted to see if a veterinary-based surveillance system could work in the swine industry. Seven veterinarians from five clinics joined in the surveillance program. The veterinarians recorded details about each of their visits to a farm or calls with swine producers. They sent their reports weekly to the surveillance program coordinator.

The researchers evaluated the surveillance program. They looked at how compliant the veterinarians were with the program, how timely the information was sent, the quality of data, and locations in Ontario the program covered. The researchers also interviewed the veterinarians to learn about their experience working with the program.

What did the researchers find?

Compliance with the veterinarians varied by individuals and by season.

Overall, compliance was low during the first 3 months of the project, but improved later on. The average time between the veterinarian collecting the data and sending it in was 22 days. Some veterinarians used personal digital assistants (PDAs) to record data and others used paper. There was no significant difference in the time to deliver records between PDA users and paper users. The surveillance program was able to obtain information from almost 24% of swine farms in Ontario. There were few problems with the forms the veterinarians had to complete. Interviews with the veterinarians gave the researchers ideas that may help shorten the time between data collection and

when the data are sent. These suggestions included: regular communication with the veterinarians, user-friendly recording systems, involving staff at the veterinarian's clinic to help with the project, and financial incentive for the veterinarians.

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