Antimicrobial resistance is a clear and present threat to human and veterinary healthcare. Without concerted effort antimicrobial resistance may make much of the modern healthcare that we take for granted today impossible to deliver in the future.

Meticillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) and meticillin-resistant S. pseudintermedius (MRSP) are the two most recognised drug resistant bacteria but others including Pseudomonas and Escherichia coli can also pose a risk to animals. All of these organisms can be associated with skin, ear and surgical site infections, which are often expensive and difficult to treat. There is a clear association in vulnerable animals between MRSA carriage, infection, antibiotic therapy and veterinary contact.

MRSA, MRSP and other drug-resistant bacteria pose a clear and significant risk to the pet population and their owners. This highlights the need for careful attention to patient management, antimicrobial use, infection control and disease surveillance.

Measures to limit the spread of antimicrobial resistant bacteria within a practice caseload include:

Key principles for infection control

1. Establishing guidelines for responsible antimicrobial use – in particular, ensuring that a bacterial infection has been confirmed and that appropriate antimicrobial drug treatment is correctly applied until the infection is completely cured.

2. Establishing a comprehensive practice biosecurity policy including infectious disease control guidelines, paying particular attention to effective hand hygiene and cleaning.

3. Using clinical audit to check whether the infectious disease control guidelines are being followed and are effective.

4. Having protocols to effectively manage animals that are infected with or are carriers of MRSA, MRSP or other antimicrobial-resistant bacteria.

5. Appointing a staff member with the authority and responsibility for ensuring that infection control protocols are available, known, understood and followed by all practice staff.

It is impossible to completely eradicate antimicrobial-resistant infections associated with healthcare settings, but a good understanding of the potential for infection and appropriate courses of action will reduce the risk.