Extended-Spectrum Cephalosporin-Resistant *Salmonella enterica* serovar Heidelberg Strains, the Netherlands

Apostolos Liakopoulos, Yvon Geurts, Cindy M. Dierikx, Michael S.M. Brouwer, Arie Kant, Ben Wit, Raymond Heymans, Wilfrid van Pelt, Dik J. Mevius

Extended-spectrum cephalosporin-resistant *Salmonella enterica* serovar Heidelberg strains (JF6X01.0022/XbaI.0251, JF6X01.0326/XbaI.1966, JF6X01.0258/XbaI.1968, and JF6X01.0045/XbaI.1970) have been identified in the United States with pulsed-field gel electrophoresis. Our examination of isolates showed introduction of these strains in the Netherlands and highlight the need for active surveillance and intervention strategies by public health organizations.

*Salmonella enterica* serovar Heidelberg is among the most prevalent causes of human salmonellosis in the United States and Canada but has been reported infrequently in Europe (1–3). Although most nontyphoidal *Salmonella* infections are self-limiting and resolve within a few days, *Salmonella* ser. Heidelberg tends to provoke invasive infections (e.g., myocarditis and bacteremia) that require antimicrobial drug therapy (4). To treat systemic nontyphoidal *Salmonella* infections, third-generation cephalosporins are preferred drugs for children or for adults with fluoroquinolone contraindications (5). Resistance to third-generation cephalosporins is increasing in *S. enterica* infections, mainly because of production of plasmid-mediated extended-spectrum or AmpC β-lactamases (6).

Resistance to extended-spectrum cephalosporins (ESCs) among *Salmonella* Heidelberg strains found in human infections, food-producing animals, and poultry meat indicates zoonotic and foodborne transmission of these strains and potential effects on public health (7,8). Unlike in Canada and the United States, few ESC-resistant *Salmonella* Heidelberg strains have been documented in Europe (9–13). However, increased occurrence of ESC resistance in *S. enterica* infections and decreased susceptibility to fluoroquinolones compromise the use of these drugs and constitute a serious public health threat (6,14).

Few data are available regarding prevalence of ESC-resistant *Salmonella* Heidelberg isolates in Europe, their underlying antimicrobial drug resistance gene content, and genetic platforms (i.e., plasmids and insertion sequence [IS] elements) associated with resistance genes. We attempted to determine the occurrence and molecular characteristics of *Salmonella* Heidelberg isolates recovered from human patients, food-producing animals, and poultry meat in the Netherlands during 1999–2013.

### The Study

During 1999–2013, the Netherlands National Institute of Public Health and the Environment collected 437 *Salmonella* Heidelberg isolates from human infections (n = 77 [17.6%]), food-producing animals (n = 138 [31.6%]), poultry meat (n = 170 [38.9%]), and other sources (n = 52 [11.9%]). From this collection, we selected 200 epidemiologically unrelated isolates for further analysis (Table; online Technical Appendix, http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/EID/article/22/7/15-1377-Techapp.pdf).

MICs for antimicrobial agents were determined with the broth microdilution method (online Technical Appendix) and showed a higher frequency of multidrug non–wild-type susceptibility phenotype in isolates from poultry meat (n = 44 [68.8%]) than in isolates from food-producing animals (n = 14 [31.8%]) and human infections (n = 16 [19.5%]). Most human infections exhibited wild-type MICs to most antimicrobial agents tested (Table).

Of the 200 *Salmonella* Heidelberg isolates in the study, 47 (23.5%) were ESC resistant. ESC resistance in *Salmonella* Heidelberg isolates increased from 33.3% in 2011 to 60.0% in 2012 to 75.0% in 2013, after which *Salmonella* Heidelberg was the predominant serotype in ESC-resistant *Salmonella* isolates in the Netherlands (Figure 1).

These isolates showed MICs for cefotaxime and ceftazidime of 2 to >4 mg/L and 4 to >16 mg/L, respectively; non–wild-type susceptibility to fluoroquinolones was 87.2%. The emergence of isolates with decreased

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1Preliminary results from this study were presented at the 12th Beta-Lactamase Meeting, June 28–July 1, 2014, Gran Canaria, Spain.
susceptibility to these first-line antimicrobial drugs limits effective treatment options for potential human infections.

ESC typing of the 47 isolates, performed by microarray analysis followed by PCR and sequencing (online Technical Appendix), revealed the presence of the bla\textsubscript{CMY-2} gene in 41 ESC-resistant Salmonella Heidelberg isolates that exhibited an AmpC \beta-lactamase phenotype. The other 6 isolates exhibited an extended-spectrum \beta-lactamase phenotype and encoded bla\textsubscript{CTX-M-2} (n = 4), bla\textsubscript{CTX-M-1} (n = 1), or bla\textsubscript{CTX-M-14} (n = 1) genes (Figure 2).

We assessed the genetic relatedness of the 47 cephalosporin-resistant Salmonella Heidelberg isolates by using the standardized XbaI–pulsed-field gel electrophoresis (PFGE) (online Technical Appendix), which identified 2 major PFGE types: XbaI.168 and XbaI.1973 (PFGE numbers assigned by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Solna, Sweden). Of the 47 isolates, 26 (55.3%) belonged to XbaI.168 and 5 (10.6%) belonged to XbaI.1973. Forty-one of the isolates were bla\textsubscript{CMY-2} carriers, 31 (75.6%) of which belonged to these 2 PFGE types; 10 (24.4%) were distributed equally among other PFGE types. Six of the 47 isolates were bla\textsubscript{CTX-M} carriers associated with 5 PFGE types (Figure 2). Comparing these isolates with those in the PulseNet database (http://www.cdc.gov/pulsenet/index.html) revealed the

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*Amp, ampicillin; Cip, ciprofloxacin; Chl, chloramphenicol; Col, colistin; ESCR, extended-spectrum cephalosporin-resistant; Fot, cefotaxime; Gen, gentamicin; Kan, kanamycin; Nal, nalidixic acid; Smx, sulfamethoxazole; Str, streptomycin; Taz, ceftazidime; Tet, tetracycline; Tmp, trimethoprim; WT, wild type.
introduction of 4 epidemic clones of ESC-resistant *Salmo
nella* Heidelberg strains in the Netherlands (JF6X01.0022/
XbaI.0251, JF6X01.0326/XbaI.1966, JF6X01.0258/
XbaI.1968, and JF6X01.0045/XbaI.1970). To raise aware-
ness and determine whether related ESC-resistant *Salmo
nella* Heidelberg isolates had been observed in other European
countries, the Epidemic Intelligence Information System
(European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control) issued
an alert on September 18, 2014.

We successfully transferred plasmids carrying extended-spectrum or AmpC β-lactamases from ESC-resistant *Salmo
nella* Heidelberg isolates to the recipient *E. coli* DH10B
strain (online Technical Appendix), PCR-based Inc/Rep typing
and multilocus or double-locus sequence typing (ST) of
the plasmids revealed that the *bla*<sub>CMY-2</sub> or *bla*<sub>CTX-M</sub> genes were located on plasmids for 46 (97.8%) of the 47 isolates. ESC-
resistant *Salmonella* Heidelberg isolates encoding *bla*<sub>CMY-2</sub>
on IncI1/ST12 plasmids were associated predominantly with
the *Xba*I.1968 (n = 26 [78.8%]) PFGE type; those encoding
*bla*<sub>CMY-2</sub> on IncA/C plasmids were associated with *Xba*I.1973
(n = 5 [71.4%]). Isolates encoding *bla*<sub>CTX-M-2</sub> on IncH1P/
ST2, *bla*<sub>CTX-M-4</sub> on IncI1/ST49, and *bla*<sub>CTX-M-14</sub> on IncI1/ST80
plasmids were associated with *Xba*I.1964, *Xba*I.1963, and
*Xba*I.1966, respectively (Figure 2).

The *bla*<sub>CMY-2</sub> gene was present in 12 different PFGE
types and was carried on plasmids of 2 different incompa
bility groups (IncI1/ST12 and IncA/C) or on the chromosome. This gene’s diverse genetic background
suggests that emergence of the *bla*<sub>CMY-2</sub>-producing *Salmo
nella* Heidelberg strain in the Netherlands results not only
from expansion of a single clone but from multiclonal dis
semination of the strain and horizontal transfer of plas
mids encoding the *bla*<sub>CMY-2</sub> gene. IncI1/ST12 and IncA/C
plasmids have been associated with the *bla*<sub>CMY-2</sub> gene in *Salmonella* Heidelberg isolates in the United States and
Canada (8,15).

We analyzed a subset of ESC-resistant *Salmonella*
Heidelberg isolates to determine the size and conjugation
frequency of plasmids carrying extended-spectrum and
AmpC β-lactamases. We also assessed a subset of *Salmo
nella* Heidelberg isolates (n = 17) for each PFGE type,
including isolates for each type if they showed variation
in extended-spectrum and AmpC β-lactamase genes or in
gene location. This assessment sought to detect the up-
stream presence of resistance genes (*bla*<sub>CTX-M</sub> and *bla*<sub>CMY</sub>)
of frequently encountered insertion sequences (ISEcp1,
ISCR1, and IS26) (Figure 2; online Technical Appendix).

We attribute the increase of ESC-resistant *Salmonella*
Heidelberg isolates in the Netherlands to the frequent oc
currence of isolates carrying IncI1/ST12 plasmids encod
ing *bla*<sub>CMY-2</sub> in food-producing animals and poultry prod
ucts imported from Brazil. Isolates from imported poultry
products are associated predominantly with PFGE types
*Xba*I.1968 and *Xba*I.1973 (Figure 2). A similar introduc
tion of ESC-resistant *Salmonella* Heidelberg strains in Ireland
was associated with imported poultry meat from Brazil (R.
Slowey, pers. comm.). Although ESC-resistant *Salmonella*
Heidelberg strains are rarely reported in Europe, their intro
duction through imported poultry meat could pose a public
health risk; Brazil is among the world’s leading countries
for exporting poultry meat.

**Conclusions**

Most ESC-resistant *Salmonella* Heidelberg isolates in our
study had profiles (*Xba*I.0251, *Xba*I.1966, *Xba*I.1968, and
*Xba*I.1970) indistinguishable from those of previous epi
demic types (JF6X01.0022, JF6X01.0326, JF6X01.0258,
and JF6X01.0045) that caused outbreaks and showed poten
cy for bloodstream infections (16). Our identification of
clonal clusters shared by ESC-resistant *Salmonella*
Heidelberg strains in food-producing animals or poultry
meat that can cause human infections underscores the risk
for potential zoonotic or foodborne transmission of these
strains to humans.

Although we observed a frequent occurrence of ESC-
resistant *Salmonella* Heidelberg isolates in poultry prod
ucts, no human infections linked to these contaminated
products have been yet documented in the Netherlands.
Nevertheless, the risk of potential zoonotic or foodborne
transmission of ESC-resistant *Salmonella* Heidelberg
strains highlights the necessity for active surveillance and
intervention strategies by public health organizations.

**Acknowledgments**

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for Disease Prevention and Control database for assigning
reference type and pattern names to our PFGE types.

We are also grateful to Patrick McDermott and Jason Abbott
for helping with comparing our PFGE types with those

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**Figure 1.** Occurrence of extended-spectrum cephalosporin-
resistant *Salmonella enterica* serovar Heidelberg isolates, the
from the PulseNet database; we also thank John Egan and Rosemarie Slowey for providing information about the ESC-resistant S. enterica ser. Heidelberg strains detected in Ireland.

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Mr. Liakopoulos is a junior scientist at the Central Veterinary Institute, Wageningen University, the Netherlands. His research interests include the genetic basis of antimicrobial drug resistance and the molecular epidemiology of antimicrobial drug-resistant human pathogens.

References
S. enterica serovar Heidelberg, the Netherlands


Address for correspondence: Apostolos Liakopoulos, Department of Bacteriology and TSE, Central Veterinary Institute, Wageningen UR, Edelhertweg 15, 8219 PH Lelystad, the Netherlands; email: apostolos.liakopoulos@wur.nl

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