

Scientists battle killer superbug

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AUSTRALIAN scientists have developed an antibody to fight a hospital superbug that has claimed thousands of lives in Britain and the US.

Professor Tom Borody, from the Centre For Digestive Diseases in Sydney, said the treatment could stop the spread of killer diarrhoea bug *Clostridium difficile*.

"If we see anybody who has it we can give them the antibody and probiotic mix to stop it spreading," he said.

Professor Borody said research showed the bug was infecting 7000 hospital patients a day in the US and claiming 300 lives.

In Britain 8400 people have died from the bug. The elderly have been the worst affected but it has also spread to women who have just given birth, resulting in one in 10 of those infected having their colons removed.

"Now research in the US has found the superbug in 40 per cent of cold meat products – that is in the US and not here. It is evolving," the professor said. Pork products were the prime carriers.

Professor Borody confirmed the first Australian case of the new strain of *C. difficile* had been successfully treated here.

He credited NSW Primary Industries Minister Ian Macdonald with providing the financial and laboratory support to develop the antibody, which is now being exported to America.

"I take my hat off to him," he said. "He saw the vision and saw that it is something the Department for Primary Industries could do because it could infect Australian pigs in the future. His action could save lives and that is foresight we rarely see in Government."

Mr Macdonald said: "The infection poses a severe public health risk and in the US is linked to contaminated foods, particularly pork products. We aim to prevent such a situation emerging in Australia."

He said the development of the antibody and probiotic treatment through the work of his department and the Centre of Digestive Diseases was a "first" and an "exciting partnership".

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