



Groups Fault U.S. For Not Restricting Antibiotic Use On Farms

Use in Animal Feed Increases Risks of Superbugs

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Washington, D.C. - Public health, agriculture and environmental groups today sharply criticized a government plan to reduce antibiotic resistance, saying it fails to call for banning the use of medically important antibiotics in agriculture. Soaring increases in diseases resistant to antibiotics prompted the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and other agencies to issue a draft Action Plan this summer to address this looming public health crisis.

"The Action Plan on antibiotic resistance might more accurately be termed an inaction plan when it comes to agriculture," said Karen Florini, senior attorney at Environmental Defense. "The business-as-usual steps described in the plan's agricultural provisions simply do not reflect the severity of this emerging public health crisis."

Formal comments submitted to the CDC by Environmental Defense, American Public Health Association, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Union of Concerned Scientists, Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP) and others recommended the following:

- The FDA should heed recommendations by the World Health Organization and ban the use of medically important antibiotics in animal agriculture to speed animal growth. Farmers commonly use penicillin, tetracycline, erythromycin and others.
- Pharmaceutical manufacturers should disclose data on antibiotic use in agriculture. Industry does not currently provide information on how much of each antibiotic is fed to which animal species, making it difficult to predict or prevent increasing resistance.

- The FDA should not grant new approvals of medically important antibiotics for subtherapeutic use in animals -- low-level doses given to promote growth or prevent, rather than treat, disease.
- The Environmental Protection Agency should work to control effluents from factory-farming operations under the Clean Water Act. Run-off from factory farms can contain antibiotics, promoting the spread of antibiotic resistance.

One cause of the emerging antibiotic resistance crisis is the drugs' use to promote faster growth in chickens, hogs and other food animals and to prevent higher rates of disease caused by crowded and unsanitary growing conditions in factory farms. An estimated one-third of all antibiotics in the U.S. are fed to healthy animals at "subtherapeutic" levels -- below the dose needed to treat disease.

"Using important antibiotics simply to fatten hogs and chickens jeopardizes the value of those vital drugs," said Tamar Barlam, M.D., director of CSPI's program on antibiotic resistance. "The more antibiotics are used in livestock, the less effective they will be at treating food-borne illnesses."

"One must ask if the 87 items outlined in the plan are meant to camouflage how little real action the U.S. government is actually committed to taking," said Mark Ritchie, president of IATP. "In contrast to U.S. policies, reducing the inappropriate and dangerous use of beneficial human antibiotics is already a priority for the European Union and the World Health Organization."

The draft Action Plan is open to public comment until **Friday, Aug. 4.**

Public health, agriculture and environmental experts are available for comment:

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