

The Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act of 2009 (S. 619, H.R. 1549)

Summary

Antibiotic resistance is a growing crisis. The overuse of antibiotics in both human medicine and animal agriculture contributes to the rise of antibiotic-resistant infections that are costly and difficult to treat. Moreover, the burden of antibiotic resistance is borne by the most vulnerable in our society: children, the elderly, and those with already weakened immune systems, such as people undergoing chemotherapy or persons with HIV/AIDS. But while doctors are actively curtailing unnecessary uses of antibiotics in human medicine, operators of CAFOs (confined animal feeding operations) continue to use vast quantities of these priceless drugs every day in the feed and water of animals that are not even sick.

Within two years of enactment, the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act (PAMTA) would require the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to re-review the approvals it previously issued for animal feed uses of the seven classes of antibiotics that are important to human medicine. Any found to be unsafe from a resistance point of view will have their approvals rescinded.

CAFO operators add human antibiotics to the feed of animals to accelerate animal growth and prevent diseases common in overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions. An estimated 70 percent of antibiotics produced in this country—nearly 13 million pounds per year—are used in animal agriculture for these nontherapeutic purposes. This amount is estimated to be more than four times the amount of drugs used to treat human illness.

Antibiotic resistance linked to food animal operations is on the rise. New studies suggest that hog farms are a source of a new strain (ST398) of MRSA (Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*), a disease responsible for more deaths per year in the United States than AIDS.

The FDA is aware of the problem of antibiotic resistance due to overuse in animal agriculture, but the agency's process for reviewing and withdrawing drugs from the market is far too slow and cumbersome. A recent effort to withdraw an antibiotic from use by poultry producers due to concerns about human antibiotic resistance lasted for more than five years, costing millions of taxpayer dollars. And while the judicial proceedings dragged on, disease-causing bacteria continued to outwit antibiotics.

While some producers and retailers of meat products have announced policies that take steps to curb antibiotic use, private-sector initiatives to reduce antibiotic use in animal agriculture are relatively rare, limited in scope, and difficult to verify. Federal action is needed to achieve comprehensive reductions and create a level playing field for all producers and retailers.

Passage of PAMTA is critical to keep antibiotics working for human health. In addition to averting the harmful effects of antibiotic overuse on human health, curtailing animal use of antibiotics will encourage producers to raise animals in better living conditions that are less conducive to disease.

The American Medical Association and hundreds of other health, consumer, environmental, agricultural, and humane organizations support this legislation.