

NEWS RELEASE

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LEGISLATORS AND OVER 70 GROUPS CALL FOR PASSAGE OF BILL THAT WILL REDUCE THREAT OF ANTIBIOTIC-RESISTANT "SUPERBUGS"

Senator Kavanagh, Assemblywoman Romeo and Advocates Urge Action and Protect the Public's Health

(Albany) — Senator Brian Kavanagh and Assemblywoman Jamie Romeo joined NYPIRG and over 70 national and state environmental, health, and consumer organizations today to call on the State Legislature and the Governor to take action against the immediate and growing threat to the public's health posed by antibiotic-resistant "superbugs."

"Superbugs" are antibiotic-resistant bacteria that can cause serious harm or death to patients infected with them. State legislation, sponsored by Senator Kavanagh and Assemblywoman Romeo, has been introduced to address the overuse and misuse of antibiotics in farm settings. Building on laws passed in California and Maryland, the legislation prohibits the use of medically important antibiotics for "disease prevention" in food-producing animals and sets up reporting mechanisms to monitor their use in agriculture and track the emergence of antibiotic-resistant infections.

Senator Brian Kavanagh said, "The overuse and misuse of antibiotics in agriculture is a big contributing factor in a growing public health crisis that needs to be addressed if we are to avoid widespread catastrophic illnesses that people routinely experienced before the development of effective antibiotics. We have an opportunity take action now. I thank Assemblywoman Jamie Romeo, NYPIRG, Consumer Reports, and the huge coalition of organizations that are committed to educating New Yorkers about this critical issue and getting this legislation enacted."

Assemblywoman Jamie Romeo said, "I am proud to carry on the legacy of Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, who spent many years combating the overuse of antimicrobials and antibiotic-resistant 'superbugs.' Too often government does not act until there is a catastrophe – and by then the damage is done. However, given the severe threat to public health posed by antibiotic-resistant infections, we cannot afford to wait any longer because the threat is existential. That is why I am proud to sponsor legislation that will immediately reduce the nonessential use of antibiotics in food-producing animals and provide our experts with timely access to critical data that will assist them in fighting this growing epidemic. I refuse to wait for additional tragedies – we know enough now to act now."

Blair Horner of NYPIRG said, "By mid-century, worldwide deaths resulting from antibiotic-resistant infections may exceed those resulting from cancer. While the world must act, state policymakers can take significant actions through better regulation of antibiotic use in agricultural settings. NYPIRG applauds the legislative leadership of Senator Kavanagh and Assemblywoman Romeo in moving this issue onto Albany's end-of-session agenda."

For decades, the world has benefited from antibiotic treatments that have significantly reduced the deadly threats posed by infections. However, due to the overuse and misuse of antibiotics, experts now estimate that worldwide deaths resulting from "superbug" infections could exceed the death toll from cancer by the middle of this century. "Superbugs" result from the ongoing exposure infectious bacteria have to antibiotics. Over time, a small percentage of these bacteria develop resistance to the antibiotics. As their numbers grow, more people come into contact with them and the infections they cause become more difficult to treat. These bacteria are considered "superbugs."

Legislators and Groups Urge Action to Stop “Superbugs,” Page 2

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that 20 percent of these antibiotic-resistant “superbugs” emerge from farms in which animals are treated with antibiotics also used by humans. In particular, the practice of using antibiotics for “disease prevention” – in which farm animals are routinely treated with antibiotics even though no clinical signs of illness are present – helps spawn “superbugs” that are negatively impacting human populations.

“Antibiotics should only be used on livestock when they are sick,” said **Jean Halloran, director of food policy initiatives for Consumer Reports**. “This bill will help ensure that these critical medications are not misused on the farm and will keep working for both people and animals when they are really needed.”

Dr. Gail Hansen, an independent public health veterinary consultant, said, “This legislation takes important action towards combating antibiotic resistance by reducing antibiotic use in food animals to only when medically necessary, prohibiting scientifically unsupported practices, and providing information on emerging antibiotic resistance. This will serve to safeguard the efficacy of antibiotics for animals and people, while ensuring animal welfare.”

“The public is counting on licensed medical professionals to make appropriate decisions to help mitigate the growing antimicrobial resistance problem. By requiring that veterinarians oversee all antimicrobial use to treat, control, and prevent diseases in animals, this legislation would help reduce the profligate nontherapeutic use of antimicrobials in food animal production, while ensuring their continued use when it is in the best interest of animal patients and public health,” said **Eileen Jefferson, DVM, HSVMA New York State Representative**.

“Antibiotic resistance is one of the greatest threats that we face today. We must significantly reduce antibiotic use in human medicine and agriculture if we are going to preserve the efficacy of these life-saving medicines. The federal government is moving too slowly in its regulation of antibiotics in food-animal production, so we need leadership from the states. We hope New York quickly moves this bill into law.” **Lance B. Price, Director, Antibiotic Resistance Action Center, Milken Institute School of Public Health, George Washington University**.

“Every time our children get a bacterial infection or we have to have a serious medical procedure, we are grateful for the miracle of antibiotics,” said **Peter Lehner, Managing Attorney, Sustainable Food and Farming, Earthjustice**. “That’s why it’s shocking that we continue to put the efficacy of antibiotics at risk by using at least two-thirds of them in livestock and poultry for non-medical reasons, thereby accelerating the emergence and spread of antibiotic resistance. It is time for New York to show leadership on this critical public health issue.”

“We can’t afford to overuse life-saving antibiotics to produce meat. The cost to our health is simply too high,” said **Matt Wellington, Antibiotics Campaign Director for U.S.PIRG**. “I urge New York’s lawmakers to pass this bill to help ensure that these precious medicines stay effective for treating human illness.”

Ken Jaffe, MD, a New York physician and beef farmer said, “We’re facing a worldwide public health crisis, where antibiotics are becoming ineffective in treating infections because they are overused and misused in both people and animals. This bill will support farmers that employ on-farm management techniques that lower the risk of infection and reduce the need for preventive antibiotic use while preserving animal welfare. By reducing antibiotic use in food-producing animals, we can help keep these important medicines effective for treating sick people.”

“As a pediatric infectious disease physician, it has been horrifying to have to watch multiple children die of resistant infections, powerless to stop them because we had no more antibiotics to offer. We need to slow the emergence of these fatal superbugs. New York is already leading the country in work on appropriate antibiotic use in people. This bill, if passed, will help ensure the same judicious use of antibiotics in animals, slowing the emergence of resistant bacteria and helping keep all our antibiotics working—so that no child ever has to suffer that awful fate,” said **Saul Hymes, MD, Medical Director of Pediatric Antimicrobial Stewardship and Assistant Professor of Clinical Pediatrics, Stony Brook Children's Hospital**.

Attachments: Organizations’ letter to leaders, infographics from CDC, and a background fact sheet.

June 3, 2019

Re: Take Action to Protect New Yorkers from Antibiotic-Resistant “Superbugs”

Dear Governor Cuomo, Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Speaker Heastie, Senate Minority Leader Flanagan, and Assembly Minority Leader Kolb:

There is a growing threat to public health from emergent strains of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, also known as “superbugs.” And while the medical community grapples with how best to respond, the undersigned organizations urge you to directly address one of its major causes – the misuse and overuse of medically important antibiotics in agriculture. We ask your support for action to eliminate the use of antibiotics in food-producing animals for disease prevention (except in very limited circumstances) and to allow use only for treatment of sick animals and for certain medical procedures.

Here are the facts: In the U.S., approximately 65 percent of medically important antibiotics, i.e., those that are important for human medicine, are also sold for use in food animals – cattle, pigs, turkeys, chickens – typically raised in large-scale industrialized operations. But most of the animals getting antibiotics aren’t actually sick. Nonetheless, antibiotics are being routinely administered to the animals en masse in their food and/or water to allow them to survive often overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions.

Overuse and misuse of antibiotics in food-producing animals creates the perfect conditions for the development of bacteria that are resistant to those same antibiotics – drugs that are critical to human health. While antibiotic resistance is a naturally occurring phenomenon, the speed of its development is pushed into hyperdrive when bacteria are repeatedly exposed to antibiotics such as they are in industrialized farm settings. The antibiotics kill off the bacteria that don’t have resistance, but those that do multiply and spread.

Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can travel easily from farms to people. They can contaminate the food we eat, the air we breathe, the water we drink. They can spread easily between people via direct contact, coughing, sneezing, poor hygiene, and sharing of personal items. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can also transfer their resistance to other bacteria, *e.g.*, in the human gut, making those bacteria resistant to medically important antibiotics, too.

The World Health Organization, the United Nations General Assembly, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the New York State Department of Health, and many other public health organizations have identified antibiotic-resistant infections as a grave threat to human health. Antibiotic-resistant infections are currently estimated to be responsible for at least 2 million people in the U.S. become infected with antibiotic-resistant bacteria and as many as 162,000 of them die from it. A U.K. government-sponsored study predicted 10 million deaths per year worldwide by 2050 – more than from cancer – if action is not taken now to combat antibiotic-resistant infections.

While overuse in medical settings is a primary contributor to antibiotic resistance, overuse and misuse in agriculture creates resistant superbugs that infect people via food, water, airborne dust, and worker exposure. The CDC estimates that approximately 400,000 Americans get sick each year by eating food contaminated with antibiotic-resistant bacteria and that 20% of all antibiotic-resistant infections are caused by germs from food and animals. Unchecked, the growing threat of antibiotic resistance will lead to a world where strep throat, tuberculosis, childbirth, tooth infections, skin scrapes, and routine

Take Action to Protect New Yorkers from Antibiotic-Resistant “Superbugs”

surgery could once again become the death sentences they all too often were before the discovery of antibiotics 100 years ago.

Given these high stakes – and the lack of effective regulation from the federal government – it’s up to states like New York to help save antibiotics and prevent a national health crisis. For this reason, New York should institute a ban on the use of antibiotics in food-producing animals for the purposes of disease prevention. Veterinarians should only prescribe antibiotics to those animals that are sick (e.g., with mastitis), or in certain circumstances to control the outbreak of disease from a contagious animal(s), or in relation to certain medical procedures (e.g., surgery, castration).

Now is the time to enact strong antibiotic use policies that will keep medically important drugs working for us and protect them for use by future generations. New York should join California and Maryland in leading the fight against antibiotic resistance.

Sincerely,

Gretchen DuBeau,
Executive and Legal Director,
Alliance for Natural Health USA

Jane A. Kramer, Director,
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of Antibiotics

Carrie Balkan,
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Cailen LaBarge,
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Animal Equality

Cathy Liss,
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Animal Welfare Institute

Laura Rogers,
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Beyond Pesticides

Maisie Ganzler,
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Bon Appétit Management Co.

Hannah Connor,
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Center for Biological Diversity

Michael Green, CEO,
Center for Environmental
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Andrew Kimbrell,
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Rebecca Bratspies, Director,
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Reform

Mary Smith,
Church Women United in
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Kathleen A. Curtis, LPN,
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Clean and Healthy New York

Matt Wellington, Chairperson,
Clinician Champions for
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Food & Water Watch

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Food Animal Concerns Trust

Suzanne Adely,
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Food Chain Workers Alliance

Diana Wright, Owner,
FoodScraps 360

Robert Ware,
Executive Director,
FOUR PAWS International

Lisa Archer, Food and
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Friends of the Earth

Stacie Orell, Director,
GMO Free NY

Leslie Samuelrich, President,
Green Century Capital
Management

Chris Green, Executive Director,
Harvard Animal Law & Policy
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Healthy Food in Health Care,
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Pam Runquist,
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Humane Society Veterinary
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Eileen Jefferson, DVM,
New York State Representative,
Humane Society Veterinary
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Seneca Lake Guardian

Roger Downs,
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Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter

Laura Luciano, Governor,
Slow Food New York State

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Stop Foodborne Illness

Daniel Lipson, Co-Chair,
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World Animal Protection

David Byrnes, President,
Yellow Barn Biodynamic, Inc.

Take Action to Protect New Yorkers from Antibiotic-Resistant "Superbugs"



How Antibiotic Resistance Happens

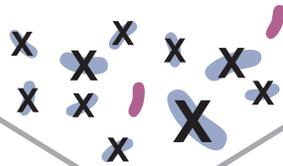
1.

Lots of germs.
A few are drug resistant.



2.

Antibiotics kill bacteria causing the illness, as well as good bacteria protecting the body from infection.



3.

The drug-resistant bacteria are now allowed to grow and take over.

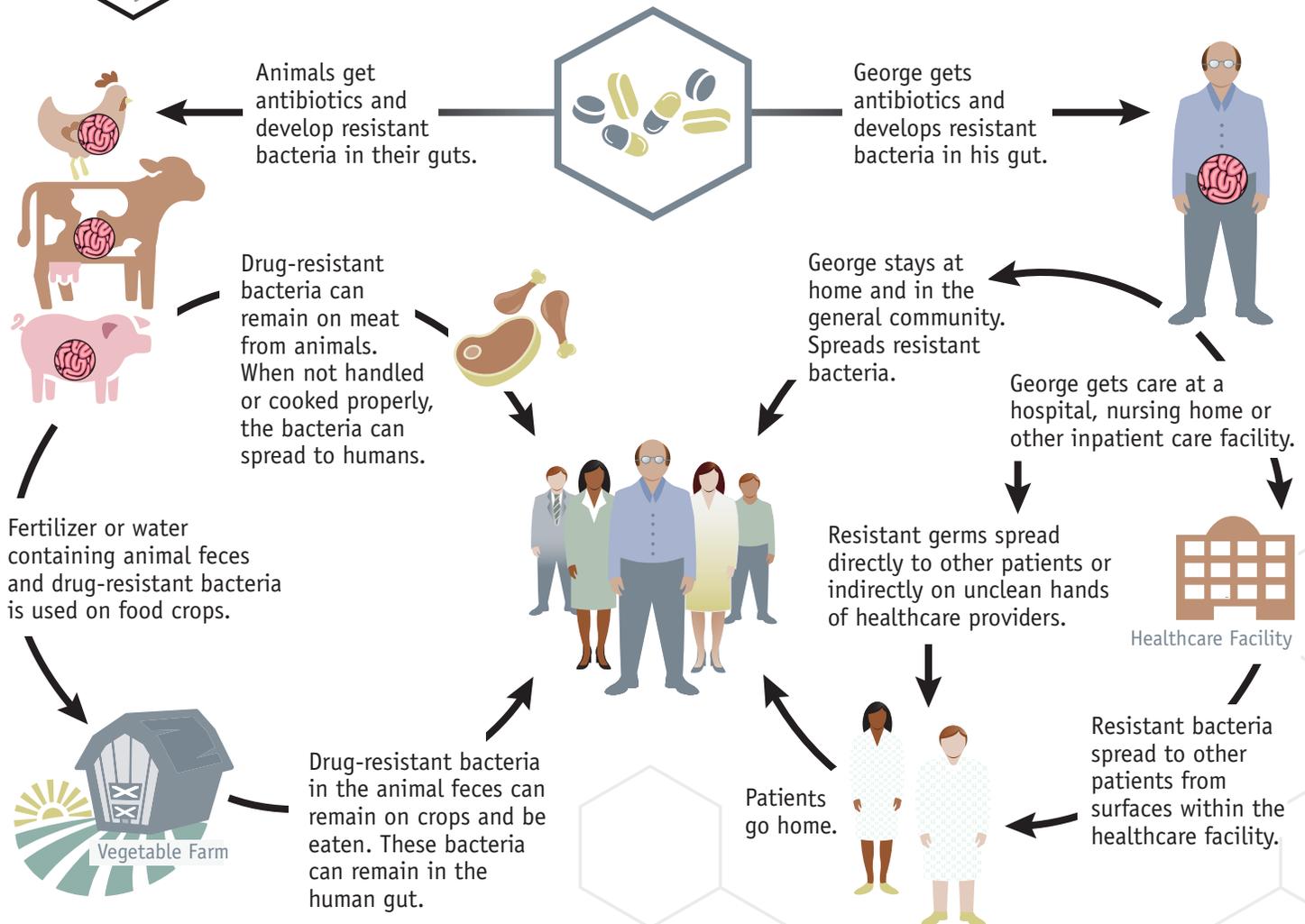


4.

Some bacteria give their drug-resistance to other bacteria, causing more problems.



Examples of How Antibiotic Resistance Spreads



Simply using antibiotics creates resistance. These drugs should only be used to treat infections.

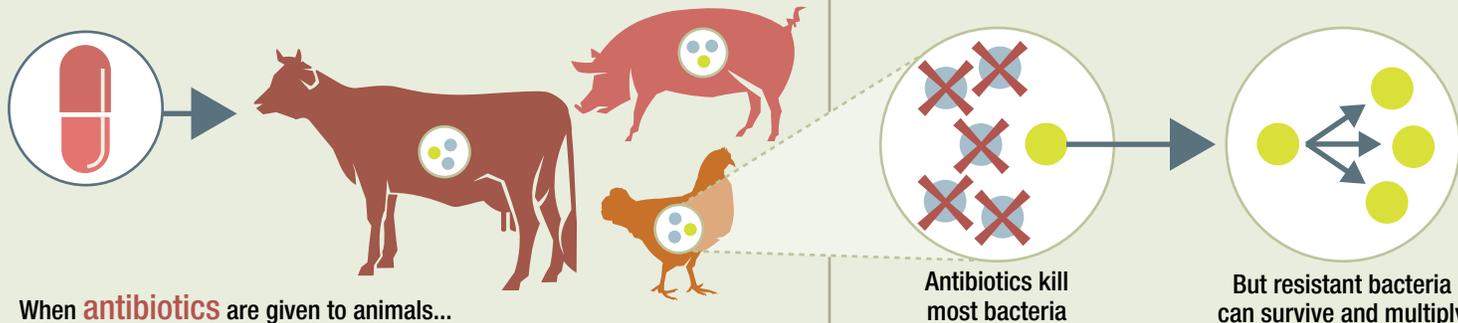


ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE

from the farm to the table

RESISTANCE

Animals can carry harmful **bacteria** in their intestines

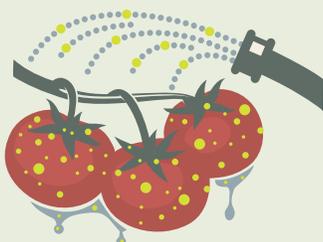


SPREAD

Resistant bacteria can spread to...



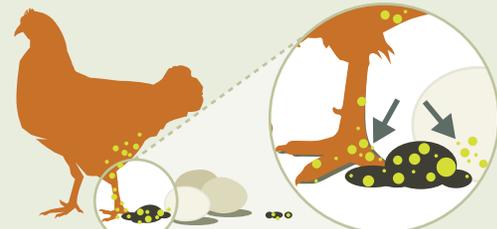
animal products



produce through contaminated water or soil



prepared food through contaminated surfaces



the environment when animals poop

EXPOSURE

People can get sick with resistant infections from...



contaminated food



contaminated environment

Learn 4 steps to prevent food poisoning at www.foodsafety.gov

IMPACT

Some resistant infections cause...



mild illness



severe illness and may lead to death

About **1 in 5** resistant infections are caused by germs from food and animals.

Source: *Antibiotic Resistant Threats in the United States, 2013*



Learn more about antibiotic resistance and food safety at www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/antibiotic-resistance.html
Learn more about protecting you and your family from resistant infections at www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/protecting_yourself_family.html

SUPERBUGS: A GROWING HEALTH THREAT

Antibiotics might rightfully be considered one of the medical miracles of the last century because of their powerful ability to fight illness and disease caused by bacteria. However, due to their overuse and misuse in humans and animals, many strains of bacteria have evolved resistance to medically important antibiotics, meaning they are not killed by the drugs. Instead, they survive, multiply, and spread. In fact, the more antibiotics are used, the faster antibiotic-resistant bacteria (aka “superbugs”) develop, putting more people around the world at increased risk of contracting an antibiotic-resistant infection. The spread of antibiotic resistance knows no geographic boundaries. And it is already compromising our ability to treat and prevent disease, especially in those who are typically more vulnerable – children, seniors, and those with compromised immune systems.

Antibiotic-resistant bacteria are most prevalent in environments associated with high antibiotic use: healthcare settings, the general community, and in livestock production. Antibiotic resistance can spread from person to person, from animal to person, via the natural environment or contaminated food and from bacteria to bacteria. Some bacteria have developed resistance to multiple antibiotics, making them especially difficult to treat, and thus very dangerous and sometimes deadly. Common infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, pneumonia, blood poisoning, food poisoning, and gonorrhea have already become harder and sometimes impossible to treat due to multidrug-resistant bacteria.

In recognition of the serious threat to public health posed by antibiotic-resistant infections, members of the U.N. General Assembly in 2016 committed to taking collaborative action.¹ The World Health Organization considers it to be one of the biggest threats to global health, food security, and international development today.² The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has stated that fighting this threat is a public health priority and estimates that each year, **at least 2 million people in the U.S. become infected with antibiotic-resistant bacteria and as many as 162,000 of them die from it.**³ A study commissioned by the U.K. government predicts that if action is not taken now to combat antibiotic resistance, **by 2050 the annual death toll will have risen to 10 million globally.**⁴ Most major medical and health groups in the U.S., including the American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, and Infectious Diseases Society of America, have recognized the urgency of the antibiotic resistance crisis.⁵

Antibiotic Resistance and Food Safety

For almost 70 years we have been giving antibiotics to the animals we eat for food. To date, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved 41 antibiotics for use in food-producing animals, 31 of which are medically important for humans. According to FDA’s 2017 data on domestic sales of medically important antibiotics, 65% of them are sold for use in livestock.⁶ When antibiotics are given to food-producing animals, they kill most of the bacteria in them. The resistant bacteria, however, survive and can contaminate animal products during slaughtering and processing. They can also contaminate fruits and vegetables via contaminated soil or water, especially when animal manure is used as fertilizer. Antibiotic-resistant

FACTS

2 million
Americans get sick
with antibiotic-
resistant
infections every
year and up to
162,000 die from
them.

Antibiotic
resistance costs
the U.S. **\$20 billion**
in excess direct
care costs and **\$35**
billion in lost
productivity.

1 out of 5
antibiotic-resistant
infections are
caused by germs
from food and
animals.

Salmonella and
Campylobacter,
common food
contaminants,
cause **410,000**
antibiotic-resistant
infections in the
U.S. each year.



bacteria can contaminate food prepared on germ-filled surfaces and the environment via animal feces. According to the CDC, **approximately 1 in 5 antibiotic-resistant infections are caused by germs from food and animals.**⁷ ***Salmonella* and *Campylobacter*—bacteria that commonly contaminate food—cause approximately 410,000 antibiotic-resistant infections in the U.S. each year.**⁸

In 2013-14, one of the largest outbreaks of multidrug-resistant *Salmonella* infections—which sickened 634 people in 29 states and Puerto Rico—was traced back to consumption of a particular chicken brand that had been contaminated with the resistant bacteria.⁹ A recent study of packaged chicken samples and patients with urinary tract infections (UTIs) in Flagstaff, Arizona, showed evidence that some of the patients had gotten their infections from *E. coli* that had originated in poultry. Moreover, these *E. coli* strains were more likely than others to be resistant to tetracycline and gentamicin, two of the antibiotics used in poultry production. This supports the observations of many previous studies that the use of antibiotics in food-producing animals creates antibiotic-resistant bacteria that can infect humans.¹⁰

Antibiotic Resistance in New York State

In response to the emerging crisis, Governor Cuomo and New York State Department of Health launched the NYS Antimicrobial Resistance Prevention and Control Task Force, which released a report in November 2018 detailing the severity of the problem and recommending a series of solutions for the healthcare, veterinary, and agriculture communities.¹¹ The task force acknowledged that antibiotic resistance reduces quality of life, undermining ability to fight infectious disease and prevent complications related to surgeries and complex care such as chemotherapy, dialysis, and organ transplants. It also noted that antibiotic resistance is an economic burden, costing the U.S. up to \$20 billion in excess direct healthcare costs and costs of up to \$35 billion due to lost productivity. In addition to recommending that the State pursue policies that promote the highest standards of animal care and limit the inappropriate use of antibiotics in livestock, it also suggested a ban on over-the-counter sales of medically important antibiotics marketed for use in fish, since antibiotic use is currently not regulated in commercial aquaculture.¹²

At its first summit, the Task Force identified limiting the use of medically important antibiotics in food-producing animals as one of the top three priorities for preventing the emergence of antibiotic resistance. It was also suggested that legislation be enacted to eliminate the use of medically important antibiotics in livestock production and that regulations be passed requiring all NYSDOH-licensed hospitals and SUNY facilities to purchase food sourced exclusively from animals raised without use of medically important antibiotics.¹³

For more information contact NYPIRG: Blair Horner, 518-436-0876 ext. 257, bhorner@nypirg.org

¹ United Nations, see: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/842813?ln=en>

² World Health Organization, “Antibiotics Resistance,” see: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/antibiotic-resistance>

³ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Antibiotic/Antimicrobial Resistance,” see: <https://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/index.html>

Burnham JP, et al. (2019). “Re-estimating annual deaths due to multidrug-resistant organism infections,” *Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology* 2019, 40, 112–113. doi: 10.1017/ice.2018.304, see: https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/C9B09A787FCCA1EA992AF45066F3FF7C/S0899823X18003045a.pdf/reestimating_annual_deaths_due_to_multidrugresistant_organism_infections.pdf.

⁴ World Health Organization, see: <https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/94/9/16-020916/en/>.

⁵ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Joint Statement on Importance of Outpatient Antibiotic Stewardship,” see: <https://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/community/partners/joint-statement.html>

⁶ Natural Resources Defense Council, “Livestock Antibiotic Sales See Big Drop, but Remain High,” see: www.nrdc.org/experts/avinash-kar/livestock-antibiotic-sales-drop-remain-very-high

⁷ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, see: <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/pdfs/ar-infographic-508c.pdf>.

⁸ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Antibiotic Resistance Threats in the United States, 2013,” see: <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/pdfs/ar-infographic-508c.pdf>.

⁹ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Multistate Outbreak of Multidrug-Resistant *Salmonella* Heidelberg Infections Linked to Foster Farms Brand Chicken,” see: <https://www.cdc.gov/salmonella/heidelberg-10-13/index.html>

¹⁰ *Wired*, “The Hidden Link Between Farm Antibiotics and Human Illness,” see: <https://www.wired.com/story/farm-antibiotics-human-illness-hidden-link/>

¹¹ New York State Department of Health, “The NYS Stop Antibiotic Resistance Roadmap (STARR),” see:

https://www.health.ny.gov/professionals/protocols_and_guidelines/antibiotic_resistance/docs/nys_starr.pdf.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ NYS Department of Health, “New York State Antimicrobial Resistance Prevention and Control Task Force Summit, December 7, 2016,” see: http://update.nyshfa.org/attachment/1003/mm16-492a.pdf?g_download=1