

NEWS RELEASE

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SENATOR BRIAN KAVANAGH, ASSEMBLYWOMAN LINDA ROSENTHAL, AND OVER 70 GROUPS ADVOCATE FOR PASSAGE OF BILL THAT WILL REDUCE THREAT OF ANTIBIOTIC-RESISTANT “SUPERBUGS”

Legislation Is Necessary to Protect Public Health

(Albany) — Senator Brian Kavanagh and Assemblywoman Linda Rosenthal joined NYPIRG, Consumer Reports, Center for Food Safety, and over 70 national and state environmental, health, and consumer organizations today to call on the State Legislature and the Governor to take action in the state budget against the immediate and growing threat to the public’s health posed by antibiotic-resistant “superbugs.”

“Superbugs” are bacteria that have become immune to antibiotics and as a result cause infections that are difficult to cure, and sometimes deadly. State legislation, sponsored by Senator Brian Kavanagh and Assemblywoman Linda Rosenthal (S.5742A/A.9632), addresses 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 bacteria.

“Antibiotic resistant microbes are an urgent and growing threat to public health and safety, but we can act now and avoid widespread catastrophic illnesses. We need to pass this legislation to reduce the development and spread of antibiotic-resistant infections in humans and animals and preserve the effectiveness of medically important antibiotics for treating disease for future generations. I thank Assemblymember Rosenthal, NYPIRG, Consumer Reports, and the coalition of organizations that are committed to educating New Yorkers about this critical issue and getting this legislation enacted,” said **Senator Brian Kavanagh (D-Manhattan and Brooklyn)**.

“For years, the food industry has kept animals that will ultimately become our food in cruel, filthy and deplorable conditions in factory farms. The result of this inhumanity, aside from the obvious suffering of the animals, is that antibiotics must be given to totally healthy animals to prevent infection that results from the unsanitary conditions. Unless we hold the industry to account, even if we address the other causes of antibiotic resistance, we leave ourselves vulnerable to the growing threat of antibiotic-resistant superbugs. I am proud to sponsor legislation that will protect the public health and ensure the animals’ welfare by imposing reasonable limits on antibiotic use on healthy animals,” said **Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal (D-Manhattan)**.

“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**.

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 Rosenthal 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 will exceed the death toll from cancer by the middle of this century if action is not taken now to combat the crisis. According to the National Institutes of Health, “superbugs” result from the ongoing exposure infectious bacteria have to antibiotics. Over time, a small percentage of these bacteria develop resistance to antibiotics. As they replicate and spread, more people will be exposed to them and the infections they cause become more difficult to treat. Some of the bacteria can develop resistance to multiple antibiotics. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria are considered “superbugs.”

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 – spurs the evolution of “superbugs” that are negatively impacting human populations. In the [CDC’s 2019 “Antibiotic Resistance Threats in the United States”](#) report, it was estimated that Americans suffer from 2.8 million resistant infections annually, 35,000 of them resulting in death.

“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.**

“We shouldn't waste antibiotics on livestock that aren't sick,” said **Michael Hansen, Ph.D., senior scientist 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.”

“Antibiotics are frequently used to prevent disease when food animals are kept in large scale unsanitary factory farming conditions. But this isn't necessary. Meat and poultry can be raised without antibiotics--there are lots of “no antibiotics” meat and poultry products already on the market. We must end use of medically important antibiotics for disease prevention on factory farms to ensure that we still have antibiotics for sick people,” said **Jean Halloran, Policy Advisor for Center for Food Safety.**”

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.**

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. We need to 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.”

Attachments: Fact sheet, letter to leaders, infographics from CDC

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, **antibiotic-resistant bacteria are responsible for at least 2.8 million infections in the U.S.; as many as 162,000 people die from them.**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 2018 data on domestic sales of medically important antibiotics, 65.5% 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

Antibiotic-resistant bacteria cause 2.8 million infections in the U.S. each year and up to 162,000 people 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/biggest-threats.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, “Antibiotic Sales in U.S. Meat Industry Increased Nearly 10% Last Year, Driven by Pigs and Cows,” see: <https://www.nrdc.org/media/2019/191210-0>

⁷ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Antibiotic Resistance: From the Farm to the Table.”

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



How Antibiotic Resistance Happens

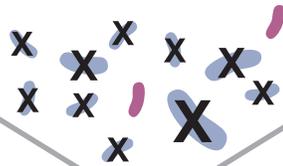
1.

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.

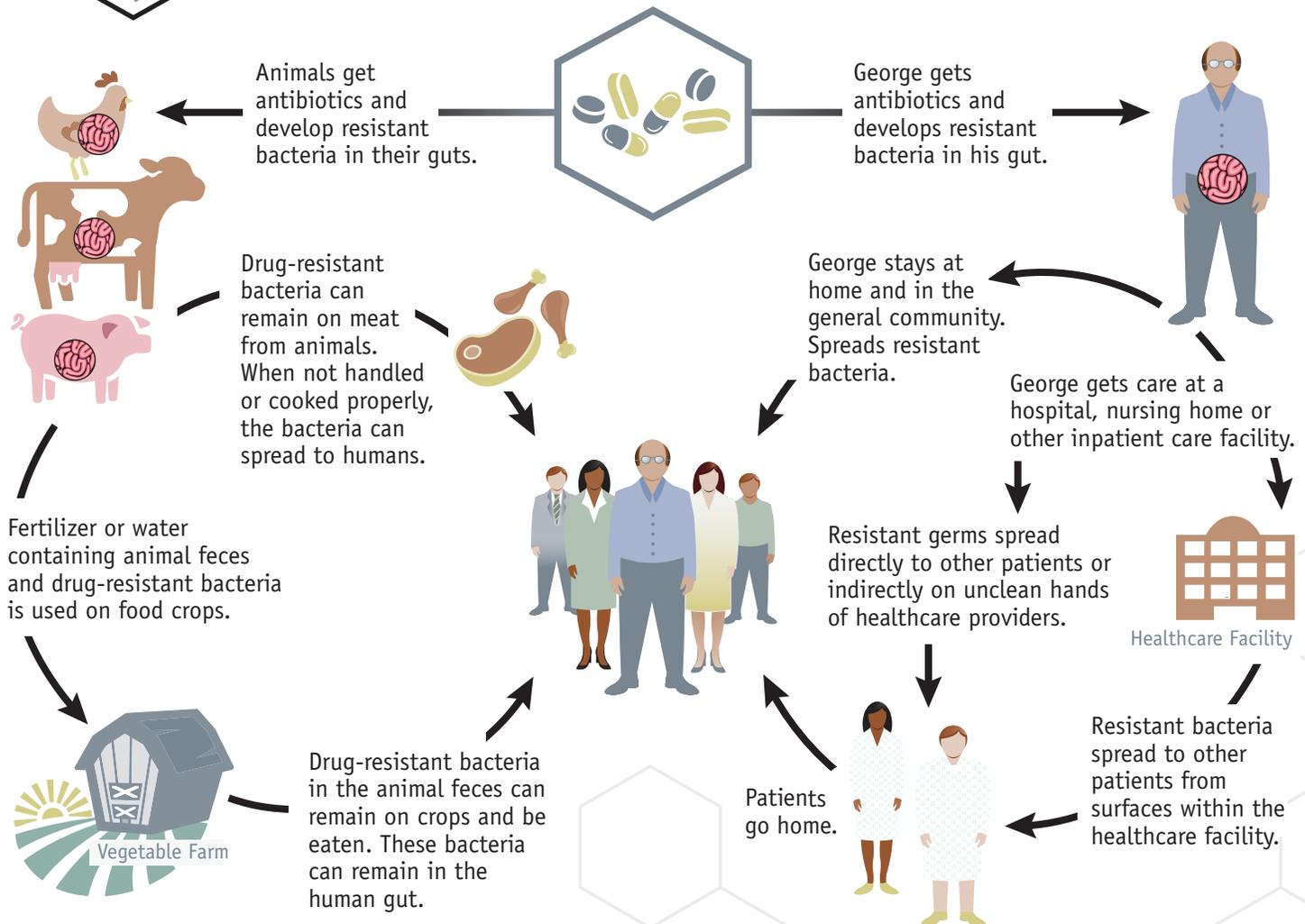


4.

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.

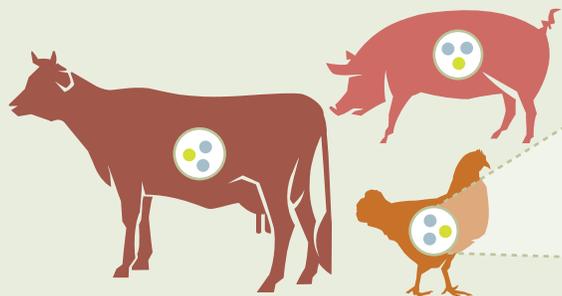


ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE

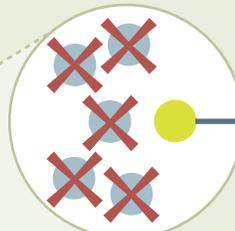
from the farm to the table

RESISTANCE

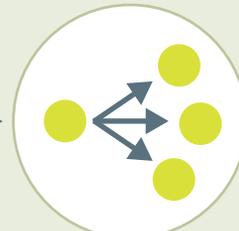
Animals can carry harmful **bacteria** in their intestines



When **antibiotics** are given to animals...



Antibiotics kill most bacteria



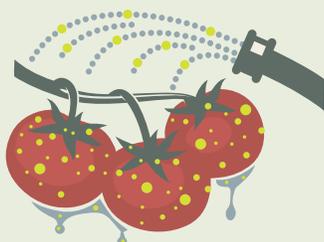
But resistant bacteria can survive and multiply

SPREAD

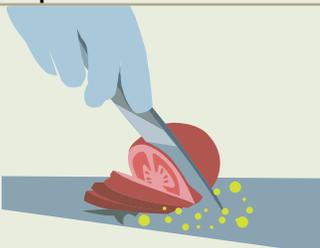
Resistant bacteria can spread to...



animal products



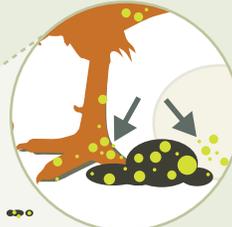
produce through contaminated water or soil



prepared food through contaminated surfaces



the environment when animals poop

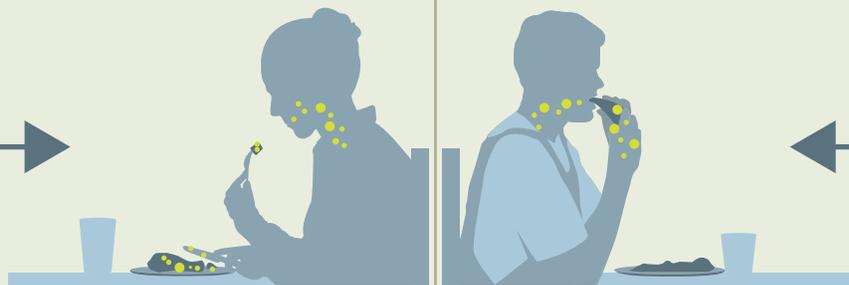


EXPOSURE

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



January 13, 2020

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 Barclay:

There is a growing threat to public health from emergent strains of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, aka “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 bacteria are currently estimated to be responsible for at least 2.8 million infections in the U.S. and as many as 162,000 deaths. 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 will 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., cows 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,
Alliance for the Prudent Use
of Antibiotics

Carrie Balkan,
Executive Director,
American Grassfed Association

Cailen LaBarge,
General Counsel,
Animal Equality

Cathy Liss,
President,
Animal Welfare Institute

Laura Rogers,
Managing Director,
Antibiotic Resistance
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Claire Fitch, MSPH,
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Environmental Health Program
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Andrew Kimbrell,
Executive Director,
Center for Food Safety

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Center for Urban Environment
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Church Women United in
New York State

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Executive Director,
Clean and Healthy New York

Matt Wellington, Chairperson,
Clinician Champions for
Comprehensive Antibiotic
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Consumer Reports

Mark A. Kastel,
Executive Director,
The Cornucopia Institute

Peter Lehner, Senior Attorney,
Sustainable Food & Farming,
Earthjustice

Ken Gale, Producer,
Eco Logic – WBAI FM

Judy Braiman, President,
Empire State Consumer Project

John E. Peck, Executive Director,
Family Farm Defenders

Andrew deCoriolis,
Executive Director,
Farm Forward

Gene Baur, Founder,
Farm Sanctuary

Alex Beauchamp,
Northeast Region Director,
Food & Water Watch

Steven Roach, Food Safety
Program Director,
Food Animal Concerns Trust

Suzanne Adely,
Regional Organizer,
Food Chain Workers Alliance

Diana Wright, Owner,
FoodScraps 360

Robert Ware,
Executive Director,
FOUR PAWS International

Lisa Archer, Food and
Agriculture Program Director,
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
Program

Jennifer Obadia, PhD,
Eastern US Director,
Healthy Food in Health Care,
Health Care Without Harm

Jill Mountjoy, Project Director,
Humane Farming Association

Mimi Brody, Director,
Federal Affairs,
Humane Society Legislative
Fund

Brian Shapiro, Senior State
Director, New York,
Humane Society of the United
States

Pam Runquist,
Executive Director,
Humane Society Veterinary
Medical Association

Eileen Jefferson, DVM,
New York State Representative,
Humane Society Veterinary
Medical Association

LeeAnn Mendrillo, Interim
Executive Director,
Hunger Action Network of NYS

Bettina Fries, MD, President
of Leadership Group,
Infectious Diseases Society of
New York

Ben Lilliston, Director of Rural
Strategies and Climate Change,
Institute for Agriculture and
Trade Policy

Nadira Narine,
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The Interfaith Center on
Corporate Responsibility

Bob Martin, Director,
Food System Policy Program,
The Johns Hopkins Center for a
Livable Future

Tawn Feeny, Media Contact,
Little Lakes Sustainability
Network

Jeanine Thomas, Founder,
MRSA Survivors Network

Avinash Kar, Senior Attorney/
Director, State Health Policy,
Natural Resources Defense
Council (NRDC)

JK Canepa, Co-founder,
New York Climate Action Group

Blair Horner, Executive Director,
New York Public Interest
Research Group (NYPIRG)

Elie Ward, MSW, Director
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External Relations,
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Betta Broad
New Yorkers for Clean Power

Andrianna Natsoulas,
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Northeast Organic Farmers
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(NOFA-NY)

Patricia Martin, President,
Northwest Toxic Communities
Coalition

Darlene Schanfald, Secretary,
Olympic Environmental Council

Neal Barnard, M.D., President,
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Science and Environmental
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Yvonne Taylor, Vice President,
Seneca Lake Guardian

Roger Downs,
Conservation Director,
Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter

Laura Luciano, Governor,
Slow Food New York State

Deidre Schlunegger, CEO,
Stop Foodborne Illness

Daniel Lipson, Co-Chair,
SUNY New Paltz Environmental
Task Force

Gay Nicholson, President,
Sustainable Tompkins

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Jamie McConnell, Director of
Programs and Policy,
Women's Voices for the Earth

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Executive Director,
World Animal Protection

David Byrnes, President,
Yellow Barn Biodynamic, Inc.

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