Antibiotics: A Cornerstone of Modern Medicine

We rely on antibiotics to treat everything from simple infections like strep throat, to more serious and life-threatening illnesses like pneumonia and MRSA. Unfortunately, these miracle drugs are beginning to fail.¹

According to studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics, every year in the United States:

- At least 2 million people become infected with bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics.
- As least 23,000 people die from antibiotic-resistant bacteria. ²
- We lose at least $55 billion a year due to excess hospital costs and lost worker productivity.³

Medical experts around the world warn of the growth of resistant bacteria. In 2013, for instance, World Health Organization Assistant Director-General Keiji Fukuda said, “Without urgent, coordinated action by many stakeholders, the world is headed for a post-antibiotic era in which common infections and minor injuries, which have been treatable for decades, can once again kill.”⁴

The Problem: Large Farms Are Overusing Antibiotics

The biggest users of antibiotics aren’t sick people, but healthy animals. According to a Pew Charitable Trust analysis of 2011 U.S. Food and Drug Administration data, 70% of the medically important antibiotics sold in the US are sold for use to raise chickens, hogs, and cattle on large farms.⁵ Much of this use is not for the treatment of sick animals. In fact, many food animals are fed a daily dose of antibiotics to help them gain weight or to prevent disease caused by unhealthy and unsanitary conditions.⁶

The Who’s Who of public health groups have cautioned against using antibiotics in this manner - including the World Health Organization, American Medical Association, American Public Health Association, the Infectious Disease Society of America, and American Academy of Family Physicians.

This massive, untargeted use of antibiotics is reckless. It accelerates the development of drug-resistant bacteria, which can then find their way to human populations through contaminated food, airborne dust blowing off farms, and water or soil polluted with contaminated feces. A poll commissioned by Consumer Reports and released by Consumers Union and Maryland PIRG, found that the overwhelming majority of doctors—a total of 93 percent—are concerned about the common meat industry practice of using antibiotics on healthy animals for growth promotion and disease prevention.⁷

Children, patients receiving chemotherapy for cancer, complex surgeries, dialysis and organ and bone marrow transplants are at increased risk of acquiring many of these infections and of severe complications.⁸ If we want to keep antibiotics working for future generations, we need to act now.

The Solution: Stop the Routine Use of Antibiotics on Large Farms

To combat the spread of bacterial drug-resistance, antibiotics for food animal use should be used sparingly, and only on sick animals. And this can be done: The U.S. Department of Agriculture acknowledged in a
January 2009 report that the presumed economic and production benefits of antibiotics in animal feed can be largely achieved by improved cleanliness of animal houses and improved testing for diseases. Ultimately this will require federal action. But while federal action is stalled, consumers and states are forging ahead.

Restaurants such as Chipotle, Chick-fil-A, Panera Bread, Elevation Burger, Epic Burger, Shake Shack, Noodles & Co, and others have already moved forward or have made strong commitments to buy meat raised without antibiotics, demonstrating that it is feasible to stop this bad practices. Unfortunately some large farms and large pharmaceutical companies are fighting against phasing out the bad practice completely. These voluntary agreements are not enough, so we are working to pass a state law in Maryland to stop the routine use of antibiotics on large farms.

**Our Campaign:**
**Pass a Maryland Law to Stop the Routine Use of Antibiotics on Large Farms**

To keep antibiotics working, livestock and poultry farms need to do their part, and that means reserving antibiotics for when animals are sick, or to stop infectious outbreaks on the farm. With Maryland’s largest chicken producer, Perdue Farms, and major restaurant chains voluntarily phasing out the use of antibiotics we have an unprecedented opportunity to do more. Antibiotics are one of the greatest advances in medical history and we are rendering them useless.

We want to pass a bill through the Maryland General Assembly during the 2016 legislative session that:

- Bans the non-therapeutic use of medically important antibiotics in livestock production;
- Requires the collection of information about antibiotic administration to track progress.
- Allows for the use of antibiotics when and animal is sick or to stop an infectious outbreak.

**For more information:** [http://www.sierraclub.org/maryland/legislation](http://www.sierraclub.org/maryland/legislation)

**To get involved:** [Legislation@MDSierra.org](mailto:Legislation@MDSierra.org)

**Maryland Groups Unite to Save Antibiotics**

The Maryland Campaign to Keep Antibiotics Working is a collaboration of advocacy organizations, public health professionals, farmers, and business owners with a mission to protect public health from the widespread overuse and misuse of antibiotics in industrial meat production. The massive use of antibiotics on animals that are not sick accelerates the development of drug-resistant bacteria, which can find their way into our communities through our food, air, and water. We support action to protect antibiotics as a critical tool to treat patients and save lives.

These groups have mobilized hundreds of public health professionals, small farmers, restaurant owners, and citizens to speak out against the misuse of antibiotics on large farms and have had their efforts covered in state and national print, radio, and television media. The groups include the Maryland Environmental Health Network, NRDC, and Maryland PIRG.

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