

FAO regional awareness event under World Antibiotic Awareness Week

13-17 November 2017

Seek expert advice to use antimicrobials responsibly

FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, Budapest, Hungary
10th November 2017 8:30-13:00

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) occurs due to a combination of factors which may be driven by excessive and inappropriate use of antimicrobial drugs in humans and animals and poor hygiene or infection control practices, thus transforming AMR into a serious global threat with a heavy economic cost.

AMR is already associated with an estimated 700 000 human fatalities annually worldwide. Inaction is projected to cause millions of global deaths yearly and, by 2050, drug-resistant infections could cause global economic damage on a par with the 2008 financial crisis (World Bank, 2016).

The proportion of antibiotics used in livestock compared with humans is unsurprisingly substantially greater. The most controversial use of these antibiotics is for growth promotion, because they do not serve to maintain the health of the livestock. As with any antibiotic use, it increases the chances that resistant bacteria will develop.

Resistance to antiparasitic agents for certain zoonotic parasites has also become a major problem. Antiparasitic agents play an important role in agriculture, and would be difficult to replace.

Scientific studies suggest that 75-90 percent of tested antibiotics are excreted un-metabolized by animals and humans and enter sewage systems and water sources. Therefore, animal waste may contain resistant bacteria, but also antibiotics.

As a result of climate change new transboundary zoonotic diseases will reach Europe and Central Asia, and the medicines to defend food systems against diseases are becoming less effective due to growing resistance. Changes in vector, pathogen and host distribution patterns will most likely create a growing demand for medicines and create more risks for AMR.

Changes in antimicrobial use in only one sector not enough to stay ahead of resistance in this evolutionary arms race -- we need to attack this problem on multiple fronts including antimicrobial residues and resistant bacteria spreading through the environment and the misuse and abuse of antimicrobials throughout the food chain and in human health... [case for One Health].

This is why FAO is working closely with WHO, OIE, EC, Russian Federation and other partners across sectors to support member states in developing and implementation of comprehensive national action plans.

Practically speaking, tackling AMR is not simply a matter of taking antimicrobials out of the hands of farmers or we would create a dangerous vacuum where infectious disease could run rampant and devastate animal health and food production and threaten public health; antimicrobials are vital to animal welfare, food safety and food security.

What we need is responsible and prudent use of antimicrobials within and across sectors so they are used appropriately when they are needed most; and these changes in antimicrobial use policy and practice need to be informed by evidence for safety, efficacy and economic viability in order to be successful.

Multi-sectorial cooperation of agricultural and human sectors and a public-private partnership programmes in several European countries have shown promising results in reduction of antimicrobial medicines use, more prudent of antimicrobials in agriculture, application of and improvement surveillance for AMR.

AMR is presented and discussed during FAO European Commission for Agriculture meeting held in Budapest, Hungary on 27-28 September 2017 with endorsed policy recommendations on AMR to member countries and FAO <http://www.fao.org/3/a-mu349e.pdf>

FAO is developing guidelines for prudent use of antimicrobials and is calling for increased investment into sustainable agricultural practices and tools to combat AMR.

We need to do more to support our veterinarians and doctors who are at the frontlines deploying antimicrobials to protect animal and human health, including improved bed-side and “pen-side” diagnostics.

There is a need increased investment in innovative agricultural practices that prioritize infection prevention to help reduce the need for antimicrobials in the first place because antimicrobials are NOT a substitute for good hygiene and management practices! And for this reason growth promotion must be phased out.

We need and we need global action to combat falsified and substandard pharmaceuticals that drive resistance.

Resistant bacteria do not respect borders – this is a global problem that demands a global solution.

The number of hungry people in the world is going up – and with a growing population and limited resources, need to invest in sustainable agricultural practices.

Combatting AMR by investing in more sustainable food production is also an opportunity to invest in Zero Hunger and our Sustainable Development Goals.