

EPHA Position on Antimicrobial Resistance

Antibiotics

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european public health alliance





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In 2011, the European Commission stated that 25,000 patients die annually as a result of infections caused by bacteria that exhibit Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR).¹ In addition to the human cost incurred, the loss of productivity and increase in healthcare expenditure costs EU health systems approximately €1.5 billion annually.² In 2012, the World Health Organisation (WHO) warned that without prompt action to reduce the incidence of AMR, we **risk returning to a “pre-antibiotic era”**, whereby previously minor infections lead to morbidity or even mortality.³

The European Parliament’s recent Own Initiative Report on the Microbial Challenge⁴ is the latest in an ongoing stream of European-level conclusions, communications, action plans and reports addressing the threat of AMR. This month, the European Centre for Disease prevention and Control (ECDC) will launch the **2012 European Antibiotic Awareness Day (EEAD)**,⁵ further drawing attention to this global issue. EPHA strongly supports the EEAD initiative and advocates for the pursuit of a holistic, ‘one health’ approach which acknowledges the interconnectedness of livestock ‘production’ and other agricultural products, food supply chains and human health, as well as the overuse/misuse of antibiotics in human medicine. As such, EPHA encourages action across all levels, targeting the regulatory framework, professional practice and public acceptance.

At the legislative level, EPHA advocates the creation of a **regulatory framework which discourages the use of antibiotics**. In its 2011 Action Plan⁶, the Commission pledged to introduce a new animal health law on the prevention of disease and a new recommendation on the prudent use of antibiotics in veterinary medicine. In 2002 the Council published a set of recommendations⁷ supporting prescription-only requirements for antimicrobial agents in human medicine. EPHA encourages the rapid implementation of the above measures, as well as strengthening of the regulatory framework on veterinary medicines and medicated feed within the 2013 Commission review package.

Moreover, since agricultural practices are of significant importance for introducing AMR into human systems through food production, the ongoing reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) needs to **ensure that AMR is given due attention** and that concrete measures are introduced, e.g. including it in the cross-compliance rules,⁸

¹ European Commission Action Plan, 2011

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_food-safety/docs/communication_amr_2011_748_en.pdf

² European Commission AMR brochure, 2011 http://ec.europa.eu/research/health/infectious-diseases/antimicrobial-drug-resistance/pdf/eu-research-on-antimicrobial-resistance_en.pdf

³ WHO factsheet 194 (reviewed 2012), <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs194/en/>

⁴ European Parliament Own Initiative Report –The Microbial Challenge

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?reference=2012/2041%28INI%29&l=en>

⁵ European Antibiotic Awareness Day 18 November 2012

⁶ European Commission 2011 Action Plan

http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/health_consumer/docs/communication_amr_2011_748_en.pdf

⁷ European Council 2001 Recommendations

http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/public_health/threats_to_health/c11569_en.htm

⁸ Introduced in 2003, this mechanism ties EU support for farmers to compliance with standards of environmental care and public/animal/plant health and animal welfare. http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/direct-support/cross-compliance/index_en.htm



together with environmental measures such as crop rotation, reduced use of pesticides or chemicals, etc.

A shift away from over-reliance on antibiotics will also require a **change in professional practice**. EPHA supports the use of campaigns such as EEAD to raise awareness amongst health professionals, in both human and veterinary fields, about the threat of AMR and the need for appropriate and prudent use of antibiotics. This includes awareness of good farming practices which reduce the risk of disease and eliminate the need for mass-treatment of livestock using antibiotics. Such education and training should be undertaken in combination with better infection control, in particular with reference to the protection of risk groups, such as children and the elderly. Health professionals must be seen as ‘gatekeepers’, promoting best prescribing and dispensing practices, informing patients about appropriate and prudent use and providing a point of contact in the monitoring of side effects and adverse reactions.⁹

Finally, EPHA considers that sustainable antibiotic use can only be achieved where there is a **reduction in public acceptance of AMR over-consumption**. Campaigns such as EEAD can help to address this problem, but a sustained health literacy initiative is necessary to ensure that individuals are aware of the risks inherent in AMR, the appropriate use of antibiotics in relation to viral infections and other resistant illnesses, and the prudent use of antibiotics in relation to self-medication. Furthermore, in order to instigate a permanent paradigm shift away from reliance on antibiotics, EPHA supports the promotion of alternative therapies. This is necessary to prevent new antibiotics becoming ineffective and obsolete and EPHA advocates the development of further research to analyse the scientific basis of alternative, non-antibiotic treatment options.

⁹ EPHA Briefing on AMR <http://epha.org/updated-epha-briefing-on-antimicrobial-resistance/>

About EPHA

EPHA is a change agent – Europe's leading NGO advocating for better health. We are a dynamic member-led organisation, made up of public health NGOs, patient groups, health professionals, and disease groups working together to improve health and strengthen the voice of public health in Europe. EPHA is a member of, among others, the Social Platform, the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), and the Better Regulation Watchdog. EPHA's Transparency register number is 18941013532-08.



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