
Act now, or face post-antibiotic catastrophe

Global action urged by new global civil society coalition

GENEVA— A new Antibiotic Resistance Coalition comprised of Healthy Food Action and Keep Antibiotics Working among other civil society groups from six continents, called today for all member states of the World Health Organization (WHO) to pass a [critical resolution](#) to ignite concerted global action to control the escalating crisis of antibiotic resistance. The resolution, supported by the United States, will be voted on as part of the 67th World Health Assembly in Geneva.

“We’re on the brink of catastrophe,” said David Wallinga, MD, a Minnesota physician and Director of Healthy Food Action in St. Paul. “We must radically change the way we use and market antibiotics, including their huge overuse in turkeys, chickens, pigs and cattle.” According to industry data reported by the Food and Drug Administration, close to 30 million pounds of antibiotics each year are given to food animals, typically for reasons other than treating disease, like growth promotion.

“It has become apparent that despite using the majority of all antibiotics for its own production purposes, little will change in animal agriculture unless there is increased international and national pressure to do so,” said Richard Wood, Chair of KAW and Executive Director of Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT). “We urge our leaders in Washington and across the globe to heed the WHO warning and take meaningful action to address this crisis.”

Public health researchers estimate that millions of people around the world are infected with antibiotic-resistant bacteria each year, and leading to hundreds of thousands of deaths. Without immediate action, that toll is expected to worsen.

The Antibiotic Resistance Coalition, through [a declaration released today](#), asserts that effective antibiotics are global public goods. It also calls for international leadership and action to, in part:

- Phase out the use of antimicrobials for routine disease prevention in livestock and end their use, altogether, for growth promotion;
- Build robust systems in all countries to monitor and report antibiotic use and resistance trends in humans and animals;
- Promote new, needs-driven research and development models based on the principle of de-linkage (divorcing price from research and development costs and sales volumes);
- Prohibit the promotion and advertising of antibiotics; and
- Improve public awareness to support behavior change around antibiotic use.

“Antimicrobial resistance—and particularly antibiotic resistance—is the most pressing public health issue facing the global community,” said Dr. Otto Cars, executive director of ReAct, a founding member of the coalition. “If the resolution is not passed, and the WHO and its Member States do not act quickly, there will be disastrous global health consequences.”

WHO Member States are tentatively scheduled to vote on the resolution on May 23rd. The Antibiotic Resistance Coalition will deliver an intervention to the World Health Assembly prior to the vote.

Antimicrobial resistance is a general term that refers to resistance to a compound that kills or stops the growth of microorganisms, including bacteria, fungus, parasites and viruses. Antibiotic resistance refers specifically to resistance to anti-bacterial agents.

The Antibiotic Resistance Coalition consists of numerous civil society organisations and stakeholders from six continents working in the health, agriculture, consumer and development sectors. It advocates for policy change and action to prevent the post-antibiotic era from becoming a bleak reality. Established earlier this year, the Coalition resulted from a series of discussions and meetings organised by the following steering group members: Anthony So (ReAct / Program on Global Health and Technology Access), Niclas Hällström (What Next Forum), Martin Khor (South Centre), Tim Reed (Health Action International), Peter Maybarduk (Public Citizen), Eva Ombaka (ReAct / Health Action International) and

David Wallinga (Healthy Food Action). Initial funding for the formation of the Coalition was provided by ReAct and the South Centre.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

- Antibiotic Resistance Coalition's [Declaration on Antibiotic Resistance](#)
- World Health Assembly Resolution EB134.R13: [Combating Antimicrobial Resistance, Including Antibiotic Resistance](#)
- WHO [fact sheet](#) and [surveillance report](#) on antimicrobial resistance