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Superbugs resistant to carbapenems found for first time in US swine
Keep Antibiotics Working calls for global reduction of antibiotics in livestock

The nation is dangerously close to having completely untreatable superbugs in our food supply as today a report announces the discovery of transferable resistance to drug of last resort carbapenem in bacteria in a U.S. swine facility. The [report](#), *Carbapenemase-producing Enterobacteriaceae recovered from the environment of a swine farrow-to-finish operation in the United States*, released today by Ohio State University, found E. coli resistant to the antibiotic carbapenem in a swine facility in Ohio. Carbapenem-resistant E. coli [superbugs cause devastation in hospital patients](#). The detected resistance was transferable meaning that it can easily spread among bacteria increasing its risk. This report is especially alarming because it follows [last year's discovery of pigs carrying superbug E. coli](#) that are resistant to colistin, another drug used when all other antibiotic treatments fail.

Carbapenems and colistin are the last lines of defense against untreatable E coli infections, having transferable resistance to both in U.S. swine creates a real risk of untreatable infection coming from swine. “It is now only a matter of time before we detect pigs carrying resistance to both carbapenem and colistin. When that happens we will have a pork supply with completely untreatable pathogens,” said Steven Roach, Food Safety Program Director of Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT) and spokesperson for Keep Antibiotics Working (KAW). “If we wait for this to happen there will be very difficult choices for farms and federal agencies to make, likely including affected farms eliminating all their animals and sanitizing their facilities, as well as holding massive food recalls.”

Though the swine industry and U.S. federal agencies have taken initial steps to keep us from having untreatable superbugs in our food supply, today's report clearly illustrate how these efforts fall short and put U.S. consumers at risk.

At the farm where the superbug was detected all piglets are given an injection of ceftiofur, a drug related to carbapenem that is critically important for treating E. coli and other serious infections in humans—as well as being the drug of last resort for swine. The authors of the study suspect that this routine use of ceftiofur contributed to the spread of the resistant superbug in the facility.

“This routine usage of one of the most important drugs we have for animals and humans goes against any sensible standards of use, but is normal practice in the swine industry,” Roach said. “This foolish use of one of human medicine’s most precious drugs is common in the swine industry, despite the drug requiring a veterinarian’s prescription.”

KAW calls on the animal agriculture industry and the federal government to prevent the nightmare scenario of untreatable superbugs in our food supply. Specifically, KAW calls for the FDA to prevent the routine use of antibiotics in animals that are not sick, and the swine industry to voluntarily prohibit the use of ceftiofur, or at least stop its routine use. KAW also calls for the industry to transparently report how antibiotics are used and to share the data with federal agencies.

The chicken industry has made significant steps in eliminating ceftiofur usage from its farms - KAW demands that beef, pork, and turkey producers should do the same. Food retailers should push for these changes so that they are not stuck with the repercussions on untreatable superbugs in their products.

“This study illustrates how the routine use of medically important antibiotics in food animals, including some of the most important drugs used in human health, is getting us dangerously close to having completely untreatable pathogens on our farms and in our food. When this happens people will die, farms will be shut down, and food will be recalled and destroyed. In order to avoid this, KAW calls on federal agencies, farms, and food retailers to act now to prohibit the use of antibiotics in animals that are not sick, set targets for reducing antibiotic use, and report how much antibiotics they use.” said Roach.

Disclosure: KAW has provided partial funding to one of the report’s authors, Susan V. Grooters, for work on antibiotic resistance advocacy, but provided no input on the research or writing of this article.

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Keep Antibiotics Working (KAW) is a national coalition of health, consumer, agricultural, environmental, humane and other advocacy groups dedicated to eliminating a major cause of antibiotic resistance: the inappropriate use of antibiotics in food animals. KAW is led by Food Animal Concerns Trust (FACT). Learn more at www.keepantibioticsworking.org.