

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release:

May 27, 2021

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4 DOZEN GROUPS CALL ON LEGISLATURE TO REDUCE THREAT OF ANTIBIOTIC-RESISTANT “SUPERBUGS” Legislation Is Necessary to Protect Public Health

(Albany) — Nearly 50 national and state health, animal welfare, and consumer organizations today call on the State Legislature and the Governor to take action against the immediate and growing threat to the public’s health posed by antibiotic-resistant “superbugs.”

“Superbugs” are bacteria that have become immune to antibiotics and as a result cause infections that are difficult to cure, and sometimes deadly. State legislation, sponsored by Senator Brian Kavanagh and Assemblywoman Linda Rosenthal (S.2871A/A.3493B), addresses the overuse and misuse of antibiotics on farms. Building on laws passed in California and Maryland, the legislation prohibits the use of medically important antibiotics for “disease prevention” in food-producing animals and sets up reporting mechanisms to monitor their use in animal agriculture and track the emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

In a letter to the governor and the legislative leaders, the groups wrote, **“There is a growing threat to public health from emergent strains of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, with a global death toll predicted to far surpass that ultimately caused by the COVID-19 virus if measures to curb it are not taken now.”**

For decades, the world has benefited from antibiotic treatments that have significantly reduced the deadly threats posed by infections. However, due to the overuse and misuse of antibiotics, experts now estimate that worldwide deaths resulting from “superbug” infections will exceed the death toll from cancer by the middle of this century if action is not taken now to combat the crisis. According to the National Institutes of Health, “superbugs” result from the ongoing exposure infectious bacteria have to antibiotics. Over time, a small percentage of these bacteria develop resistance to antibiotics. As they replicate and spread, more people will be exposed to them and the infections they cause become more difficult to treat. Some of the bacteria can develop resistance to multiple antibiotics

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that nearly 25 percent of antibiotic-resistant infections in people are caused by food contaminated with superbugs. In particular, the practice of using antibiotics for “disease prevention” – in which farm animals are routinely treated with antibiotics even though no clinical signs of illness are present – spurs the evolution of “superbugs” that are negatively impacting human populations. In the [CDC’s 2019 “Antibiotic Resistance Threats in the United States”](#) report, it was estimated that Americans suffer from 2.8 million resistant infections annually, 35,000 of them resulting in death.

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Attachment: Letter to leaders.

AN OPEN LETTER TO GOVERNOR CUOMO AND STATE LEGISLATIVE LEADERS
Re: Take Action to Protect New Yorkers from Antibiotic-Resistant “Superbugs”

Dear Governor Cuomo, Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Speaker Heastie, Senate Minority Leader Ortt, and Assembly Minority Leader Barclay:

There is a growing threat to public health from emergent strains of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, with a global death toll predicted to far surpass that ultimately caused by the COVID-19 virus if measures to curb it are not taken now. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria (aka “superbugs”) are bacteria that have mutated such that they outsmart formerly life-saving antibiotics. Antibiotic-resistance is fueled by the overuse and misuse of antibiotics and is robbing the world of the most important tools it has to stop infectious disease. While the medical profession continues to grapple with implementation of antibiotic stewardship programs and educating both doctors and patients as to appropriate antibiotic use in people, we, the undersigned organizations, urge you to take direct action now against the other main cause of antibiotic resistance – the misuse and overuse of medically important antibiotics in animal agriculture. We ask your support for bill A.3493-B (L. Rosenthal) / S.2871-A (Kavanagh), which will ban the use of medically important antibiotics in food-producing animals for the purposes of disease prevention (except in very limited circumstances) and to allow use *only* for treatment of sick animals and for certain medical procedures.

Here are the facts: In the U.S., approximately 65 percent of medically important antibiotics, i.e., those that are important for human medicine, are also sold for use in food animals – cattle, pigs, turkeys, chickens – typically raised in large-scale industrialized operations, but on smaller farms, too. Surprisingly, most of the animals getting antibiotics aren’t actually sick. Instead, antibiotics are routinely administered to the animals at subtherapeutic levels daily, mixed into their food and/or water, so that they can survive their often unsanitary and overcrowded living conditions and unnatural diets. Moreover, despite increasing awareness of the antibiotic-resistance crisis, recent FDA reports show the sale and use of medically important antibiotics in food-producing animals is trending upward, increasing 3% from 2017-2018, and another 3% from 2018-2019.

Blanket use of antibiotics on entire populations of animals creates the perfect conditions for the evolution of bacteria that are resistant to those same antibiotics. While antibiotic resistance is a naturally occurring phenomenon, the speed of its evolution is pushed into hyperdrive when bacteria are repeatedly exposed to antibiotics as they are in modern farming. The antibiotics kill off the bacteria that don’t have resistance, but the bacteria that already have a mutation or gene that makes them resistant will survive, multiply, and spread.

Antibiotic-resistant bacteria that originate in farm settings don’t stay there -- they travel easily from farms to people. They can contaminate the food we eat, the air we breathe, the water we drink. They can spread easily between people via direct contact, coughing, sneezing, poor hygiene, and sharing of personal items. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can often transfer their resistance to other bacteria, *e.g.*, those in the human gut, making gut bacteria resistant to medically important antibiotics, too.

The World Health Organization, the United Nations General Assembly, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the New York State Department of Health, and many other public health organizations have identified antibiotic-resistant infections as a grave threat to human health. **Antibiotic-resistant bacteria are currently estimated to be responsible for at least 2.8 million infections in the U.S. and as many as 35,000 deaths, though experts believe the actual numbers are much higher.** A U.K. government-sponsored study predicted 10 million deaths per year worldwide by

Take Action to Protect New Yorkers from Antibiotic-Resistant “Superbugs”

2050 – *more than from cancer* – if action is not taken now. This prediction was made before the COVID-19 pandemic, during which desperate doctors around the globe liberally dispensed broad-spectrum antibiotics under the assumption that sick COVID-19 patients were highly susceptible to secondary bacterial infections. While it turned out that only a small fraction of COVID-19 patients got secondary bacterial infections, experts believe this widespread use of broad-spectrum antibiotics has likely spurred the development of more antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

Although antibiotics overuse in medical settings is the primary contributor to antibiotic resistance, **the CDC estimates that approximately 661,000 Americans get sick each year by eating food contaminated with antibiotic-resistant bacteria and that 24% of all antibiotic-resistant infections are caused by germs from food and animals.** Unchecked, the growing threat of antibiotic resistance will lead to a world where strep throat, tuberculosis, childbirth, UTIs, tooth infections, skin scrapes, and routine surgery will once again come with a high death risk, as they did before the discovery of antibiotics 100 years ago.

Given these high stakes – and the lack of effective regulation at the federal level – it’s up to states to help save antibiotics for humans now and in the future and mitigate another looming public health crisis.. We’ve already seen what federal government inaction in the face of a pandemic leads to. **California and Maryland recently passed laws restricting the use of antibiotics in farm animals.** New York should join them in leading the fight against antibiotic resistance by instituting a ban on the use of antibiotics in food-producing animals for the purposes of disease prevention. Veterinarians should only prescribe antibiotics to those animals that are sick (e.g., dairy cows with mastitis), or in certain circumstances to control the outbreak of disease from a contagious animal(s), or in relation to certain medical procedures (e.g., surgery, castration). Keep medically important antibiotics working for people.

Sincerely,

Gretchen DuBeau,
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Alliance for Natural Health USA

Maisie Ganzler,
Chief Strategy & Brand Officer,
Bon Appétit Management Co.

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