

Connect the dots



TO MAKE chickens, hogs, and other food animals grow slightly faster, they are served antibiotics along with their feed. These drugs also help prevent the diseases that can result from overcrowding and unsanitary conditions that prevail in many factory farms. It's estimated that as much as 70% of all antibiotics used in the U.S. each year are fed to healthy animals. And here is where the problem begins.

Factory farm operators feed antibiotics to healthy animals.

WHENEVER antibiotics are used, some bacteria will eventually be able to withstand their effects. This is a natural process, but it is greatly accelerated by factory farms that unnecessarily serve antibiotics to the thousands of animals they house every day. Each animal becomes, in effect, a breeding ground for new resistant strains of bacteria. Some bacteria, so-called "superbugs," become resistant to several different types of antibiotics.

Bacteria evolve into new strains that are resistant to antibiotics.



DURING SLAUGHTER, meat may be contaminated by resistant bacteria living in animals' intestinal tracts, and you can become infected by eating undercooked meat or other foods contaminated by raw meat juices. Water may be contaminated by resistant bacteria that escape from animal manure storage lagoons, or from improperly treated manure that has been spread over crops as fertilizer. People who drink untreated water or swim in lakes or rivers can then come into contact with the resistant bacteria. Finally, farm workers may become infected while caring for animals fed antibiotics, and can then pass resistant bacteria to others in their family and community.

Resistant strains of bacteria contaminate food or escape into the environment.

YOU VISIT the doctor's office to have a bacterial infection treated, but you discover that the usual antibiotics are no longer effective. Now your doctor is forced to try other drugs (often more expensive or with worse side effects), and meanwhile you're still sick. This problem, known by scientists and health care professionals as "antibiotic resistance," is on the rise in the United States, and it already results in billions of dollars in extra medical expenses annually.



The overuse of antibiotics is to blame. In part, the cause is the unnecessary feeding of antibiotics to healthy animals on factory farms—a practice opposed by the American Medical Association and other health experts. Inappropriate use of antibiotics in human medicine also contributes to the problem.

The bacteria makes you sick, but the antibiotics that used to cure you don't work any more.

What you can do:

As a consumer:

When purchasing meat, either at the grocery store or in restaurants, try to find meat produced without routine feeding of antibiotics to healthy animals. A directory of restaurants and grocers selling such meat is available at KeepAntibioticsWorking.com/guide.

As a concerned citizen:

Ask your Representatives and Senators to support efforts to phase out use of antibiotics in healthy animals. Contact Bayer and request that they comply with the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) proposed ban on Baytril® a fluoroquinolone antibiotic that is used for treating both sick people and sick poultry. The FDA has concluded that use of fluoroquinolones in treating poultry is making them less effective in treating human disease.

Send letters to:
Helge H. Wehmeier
President and
Chief Executive Officer
Bayer Corporation
100 Bayer Road
Pittsburgh, PA
15205-9741

As a patient:

Medicine intended for bacterial infections should not be taken for viral infections such as colds, coughs, or the flu. If your health care provider determines that you do not have a bacterial infection, ask about ways to help relieve your symptoms. Do not pressure your provider to prescribe an antibiotic. Take medicine exactly as your health care provider prescribes. Take the antibiotic for as long as your doctor prescribes even if you are feeling better. Do not save the medication to treat yourself or others later.

For more information on antibiotic resistance see
www.environmentaldefense.org/programs/Health/
and
www.KeepAntibioticsWorking.com.

What we are doing:

We are pursuing three objectives to curb the spread of antibiotic resistance in the U.S.:

- 1 We are encouraging companies that produce and market meat and poultry (including suppliers, supermarkets, restaurants, and factory farms) to voluntarily stop buying or selling products that have been produced through routine feeding of medically important antibiotics to healthy animals.
- 2 We are calling on Congress and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to phase out the non-therapeutic use of medically important antibiotics in animal agriculture. Such drugs should not be used for promoting growth in food animals or compensating for overcrowded conditions at factory farms when their use threatens human health.
- 3 We are pressuring Congress and FDA to require the collection of accurate data on the production of antibiotics for human medicine and animal agriculture, and to ensure this information is readily available to the public.



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finding the ways that work

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How can the use of antibiotics on factory farms threaten your health?

Connect the dots.



Throughout America, more bacteria are becoming resistant to antibiotics due in part to unnecessary farming practices. Look inside to see how this may affect you and to learn how Environmental Defense is working to protect your health.

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