

12-09

STATEMENT OF POLICY

Preservation of Antimicrobials for Medical Treatment of Animals

Policy

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) supports federal efforts to phase out the non-therapeutic use¹ of critical antimicrobial drugs² in food-producing animals.

Justification

Antibiotics have saved countless human lives since their discovery. However, misuse and overuse of these drugs has led to the emergence and spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, which are taking a toll in the United States and around the world. Nearly two million Americans per year develop hospital-acquired infections, resulting in 99,000 deaths, the vast majority of which are due to antibacterial-resistant pathogens.³ Many antibiotic resistant strains of bacteria also include those that cause common foodborne illness. For example, nearly 1.4 million people in the U.S. contract *Salmonella* infections annually, and of those, roughly one-fifth (272,000) of the infections are antibiotic resistant.⁴ Antibiotic-resistant infections can be extremely difficult to treat, and frequently result in longer and more serious illness, and in some instances, even death.⁵ Moreover, the burden of antibiotic resistance is borne by the most vulnerable members of our society: children, the elderly, and individuals whose immune systems are already weakened, such as people undergoing chemotherapy or those with HIV/AIDS.⁶ Treating antibiotic-resistant infections is also more costly. In 2009, Cook County Hospital and the Alliance for Prudent Use of Antibiotics estimated that the total healthcare cost of antibiotic resistant infections in the United States was between \$16.6 and \$26 billion.⁷ For the reasons above, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has declared that antibiotic resistance is among its top concerns.⁸

Officials from both the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture have indicated that use of antibiotics in animal agriculture have likely led to cases of antibiotic resistance among humans and that medically important antibiotics should be used judiciously in animals.⁹ Scientific evidence has further supported the link between agricultural antimicrobial use and antimicrobial resistance.^{10,11} An estimated 80 percent of all antimicrobials sold in the United States in 2009 were sold for use in food animals.¹² Prolonged, non-therapeutic use of antibiotics to promote animal growth and reduce infections associated with the overcrowded and unsanitary conditions at these facilities is a common practice on industrial animal food farms. Such practices may increase growth of resistant bacteria and colonization of, and propagation among, individuals who handle or consume meat.¹³

While Congress has already taken several steps to curb antibiotic overuse in human medicine through amendments to the Public Health Service Act, it has yet to legislate non-therapeutic



antibiotic overuse in agriculture^{14,15}. The Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act (PAMTA) has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate and has gained support of the Infectious Diseases Society of America, American Medical Association, Union of Concerned Scientists, The Pew Charitable Trusts, and hundreds of other health, consumer, environmental, agricultural, and humane organizations.¹⁶

PAMTA amends the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to require the Secretary of Health and Human Services to deny an application for a new critical antimicrobial animal drug, unless there is reasonable certainty of no harm to human health due to the development of antibiotic resistance attributable to the non-therapeutic use of the drug. Additionally, the bill requires the Secretary to withdraw approval of the non-therapeutic use of such drugs already in use in food-producing animals within two years of enactment, unless there is reasonable certainty that the drug does not harm human health, particularly in regard to antibiotic resistance. PAMTA does not prevent the use of antimicrobial therapy for diseased animals or for prophylaxis use when disease is documented in a herd or flock.^{17,18}

The passage of PAMTA and implementation of other federal efforts to phase out the non-therapeutic use of critical antimicrobial drugs in food-producing animals is critical to keep antibiotics effective for animal and human health. In addition to averting the harmful effects of antibiotic resistance in human health, curtailing animal use of antibiotics will encourage producers to raise animals in better living conditions that are less conducive to disease.¹⁹

References

1. Non-therapeutic use - any use of the drug as a feed or water additive for an animal in the absence of any clinical sign of disease.
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Record of Action

Proposed by the Infectious Disease Prevention and Control Workgroup

Approved by NACCHO Board of Directors

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