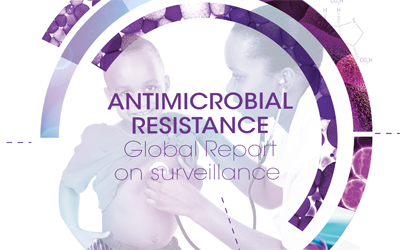
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**WHO Report Calls for More Surveillance of Antibiotic Resistance**

BY [**LYDIA ZURAW**](http://www.foodsafetynews.com/author/lzuraw/) | MAY 1, 2014

[](http://www.foodsafetynews.com/files/2014/04/WHOreport_406x250.jpg)The World Health Organization (WHO) released its global [report](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/112642/1/9789241564748_eng.pdf?ua=1) on antibiotic resistance (ABR) surveillanceWednesday, and the outlook isn’t particularly positive.

Resistance to common bacteria is a growing concern around the world, but the report found that “surveillance of ABR generally is neither coordinated nor harmonized, compromising the ability to assess and monitor the situation.”

In addressing ABR in food-producing animals and the food chain, WHO stated that, “Major gaps exist in surveillance and data sharing related to the emergence of ABR in foodborne bacteria and its potential impact on both animal and human health.”

“WHO has talked about antibiotic resistance as being a serious problem, but this is sort of the first time they pulled all the pieces that they had together,” saidDr. [Gail Hansen](http://www.pewhealth.org/experts/gail-hansen-85899367309), a senior officer for Pew’s campaign on human health and industrial farming.

Resistance in the bacteria that cause gastroenteritis can increase the severity of disease and result in poorer outcomes for patients, the report notes. Because the classes of antibiotics used in food-producing animals and in human drugs “are mostly the same,” there’s increased risk of emergence and spread of resistant bacteria.

Another issue is the ability for bacteria to carry different resistance mechanisms, which are then transferred to humans and could then give rise to infections not recognized as foodborne. WHO cites urinary tract infections caused by E. coli that could have been initially foodborne and concerns about Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) infections related to high-density swine production.

Despite international recommendations, only a limited number of countries have surveillance programs for food animals, including Canada, Denmark, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands and the U.S. And because of differences in production systems, sampling methodology, sites and procedures, laboratory protocols, and prevailing bacteria between countries, comparisons are difficult, if not impossible.

The report doesn’t say there’s a lack of scientific evidence that antibiotic overuse is a danger, but that more data are needed on antibiotic consumption in food animals and on the occurrence of antimicrobial resistance “to figure out who’s doing what and to be able to figure out what we’re doing that’s helping and what we’re doing that isn’t,” Hansen says.

WHO recommends that countries develop coordinated sampling and testing of bacteria from food animals, foods, environmental sources and clinically ill humans.

Of antimicrobial resistance as a whole, the reports states, “There is a need for an improved and coordinated global effort, including wider sharing of surveillance data.” In addition, WHO is working with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) to promote the development of tools and standards for harmonized surveillance, collaboration between existing surveillance networks, and the elaboration of strategies for population-based surveillance.

Cleaning up a little corner of the world is important, Hansen notes.

“Every country is starting from a different place, but there are forward steps that every country can do,” she says.

Ultimately, “The WHO report really demonstrates that antibiotic resistance is a threat that doesn’t have borders,” Hansen says. “You can be anyplace in the world in 24 hours, and the bacteria can be, too. Anything that happens in one part of the globe is going to affect the entire globe at some point.”

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