

MEPs laud new antibiotics rules

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News

New rules on the responsible use of antibiotics have been adopted just ahead of the annual European Antibiotic Awareness Day.

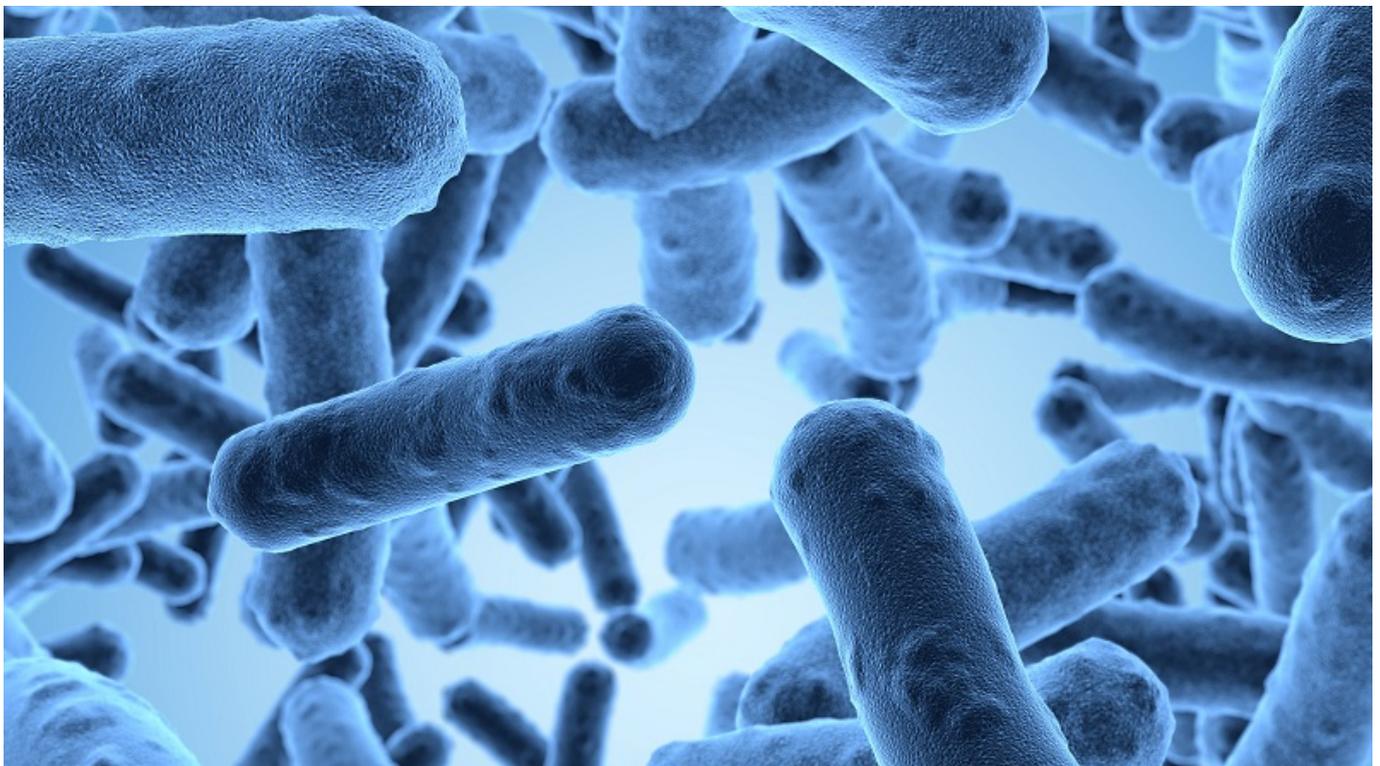


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MEPs have welcomed the adoption of new EU-wide rules on the use of antibiotics in animals as a “major step forward” for public health.

The rules overwhelmingly adopted by parliament in Strasbourg on 25 October are designed to help fight antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and keep food free from resistant bacteria.

The parliamentary vote comes just ahead of European Antibiotic Awareness Day on 18 November.

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The outcome of the plenary vote was welcomed by French deputy Françoise Grossetête, parliament's rapporteur on the regulation of veterinary medicinal products.

She said: "This is a major step forward for public health. Beyond farmers or animal owners, the use of veterinary medicines concerns us all, as it has a direct impact on our environment and our food; in short, on our health."

The EPP member added, "Thanks to this law, we will be able to reduce antibiotic consumption on livestock farms, an important source of resistance that is then transmitted to humans. Antibiotic resistance is a real sword of Damocles, threatening to send our health care system back to the Middle Ages."

The new rules will limit the use of antimicrobials to single animals and not groups. Such drugs can be used only when "fully justified" by a veterinarian and not to enhance the growth of animals.

"Work should be done to increase awareness about the benefits of antibiotics" Clara Aguilera García

The law, backed by 583 votes to 16, will also allow the European Commission to select antimicrobials to be reserved for treating humans alone. While the measures specifically aim to protect animals' health and welfare, it is also hoped that the plans, which follow agreement between the Commission, Parliament and Council, will help raise public awareness about the benefits of the responsible use of antibiotics.

The rules still need to be formally approved by member states but this is expected to be a formality.

Two MEPs closely involved with the issue have also welcomed the move. Spanish Socialist member Clara Aguilera García said, "Antibiotic resistance is a growing problem globally and brings huge societal and economic challenges."

García, vicechair of the committee on agriculture and rural development, added, "I have dealt several times with issues relating to AMR and efforts have been made by European farmers to make improvements in tackling this issue."

She continued, "Recently, we have taken a significant step in the battle against antibiotic resistance, harmonising the rules and use of medicated feed through the new regulation. Medicated feed is a safe and controlled way to treat animals, ensuring an accurate dosage of the veterinary medicines. This is

crucial in fighting antibiotic resistance. These updated rules will ensure the responsible use of antibiotics.”

García also warned that the responsible use of antibiotics and the commitment of all sectors will be critical to the success of any strategy to tackle antibiotic resistance.

The MEP added, “Work should also be done to increase awareness in citizens about the benefits of antibiotics and also their responsibility in protecting those medicines for future generations. Current statistics clearly show that there is still room for improvement when it comes to information and knowledge regarding the use of antibiotics both in the human and veterinary sector. Therefore, initiatives such as the European Antibiotic Awareness Day should be encouraged.”

“Antibiotic resistance is a real sword of Damocles, threatening to send our health care system back to the Middle Ages” Françoise Grossetête

Her Czech Socialist colleague Pavel Poc echoed García, saying the plenary vote represented “a leap forward” in the fight against AMR.

He said, “For a long time, I have been saying that the massive use of antibiotics in animal feed to accelerate growth is far more dangerous than the abuse of antibiotics in human medicine. Therefore, not surprisingly, I think we should go much further to stop the current practice of massive use of antibiotics in husbandry.”

He added, “The world is running out of antibiotics. Numerous multi-resistant bacteria already exist but we lack any sort of crisis mechanism. In fact, only a few countries have adequate plans for dealing with a high-scale health crisis”.

Poc wants to see an EU-wide strategy with concrete measures and dedicated finances.

“We need this now. Too little has happened since the Commission’s report in 1999 and the time for half of the measures recommended by the Commission has run out.”

Poc said, “Despite all the warnings about antibiotics’ impact on the environment, this aspect is still being overlooked. The Commission should finally come up with legislation covering antibiotics production waste and the executive should also include AMR in all of its third countries partnership and economic agreements”.

“AMR is happening globally. In order to minimise its damage, we need a coordinated approach” Pavel Poc

Poc also warned that Europe was turning a blind eye to the impact of cheap drug production in third countries and to AMR-related deaths outside Europe.

“AMR is happening globally. In order to minimise its damage, we need a coordinated approach and Europe should do all it can to help.”

About the author

Brian Johnson is the managing editor at The Parliament Magazine

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