

Tuesday, 15 February 2022

Dear Commissioner Kyriakides,

In its One Health Action Plan against Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR), the European Commission committed to reducing the emergence and spread of AMR and to increasing the development and availability of new effective antimicrobials.

Considering that the main cause of AMR is antimicrobial use, a reduction in the unnecessary use of antimicrobials will be crucial to achieving this objective. This includes antimicrobials used in food-producing animals.

In Europe, [5,577 tonnes of antimicrobials were sold for food production in 2020](#) alone. **14.6% of those medicines were antimicrobials identified as 'highest priority critically important' by the WHO** - i.e. last-resort antimicrobials that are vital for human health.

When last-resort antibiotics are no longer effective, some infections may be impossible to treat. The overuse and misuse of antibiotics in farming is associated with a growing number of resistant bacteria that can spread to humans [through direct contact with animals on farms, the processing, transport, or handling of food animals and food, and through the environment.](#)

Colistin is one of the last-resort antimicrobials used in farming. Whilst its use in human health was originally very restricted due to its toxicity, colistin is now widely used as a last-resort antibiotic to treat infections caused by gram-negative bacteria that are resistant to carbapenems. It is notably used to treat pulmonary bacterial infections in cystic fibrosis patients.

Despite its importance for human health, colistin is still used in veterinary medicine across Europe. In 2020 colistin accounted for [2.8% of the total sales of antimicrobials for food-producing animals](#) in Europe.

Colistin is used especially in pigs, which are [commonly weaned early from their mothers for increased profitability.](#) This can lead [piglets to develop neonatal diarrhea,](#) which is often treated with antibiotics. Alternative prevention and treatment measures, such as later weaning, would [reduce the need for antimicrobials.](#)

Colistin-resistant bacteria are spreading around the world. In the EU, the situation is especially worrying in southern countries, where increasing carbapenem resistance has led doctors to start using colistin more frequently to treat bacteria resistant to these antibiotic agents. In one Greek hospital, [colistin resistance rates rose from 0% in 2007 to 8.1% in 2008 and to 24.3% in 2009.](#) Similarly, in Italy, there

has been a [rise in colistin resistance](#) in *K. pneumoniae* bacteria, from 1 to 2% in 2006 to 33% in 2009.

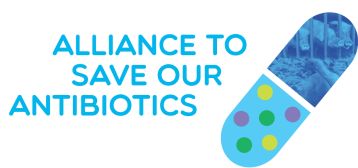
In light of the crucial importance of colistin, we call on the European Commission to **include colistin in the list of antimicrobials reserved for human health**. We must safeguard colistin and make sure that this critically important antimicrobial is not used to sustain poor husbandry practices.

The names of the over 150 European health professionals endorsing this call have been removed from this version in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation.

Supporting organisations:

Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics
AMR Ireland
Austrian Doctors for the Environment
Compassion in World Farming EU (CIWF)
Deutsche Umwelthilfe e.V.
Doctors against Factory Farming
Doctors for Extinction Rebellion
European Association of Hospital Pharmacists (EAHP)
European Forum for Primary Care (EFPC)
European Specialist Nurses Organisation (ESNO)

Germanwatch
Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) Europe
Huize Aarde
Irish Doctors for the Environment
Karkinaki
Norwegian Cancer Society
Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME)
WONCA Working Party on the Environment



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