

U.N. taking aim at antibiotics use

Mike Stobbe | The Associated Press

World leaders are pushing to end the overuse of antibiotics and to encourage the development of new medicines, driven by concern that drug-resistant germs could lead to millions of deaths and undermine the global economy.

For only the fourth time in its 70-year history, the United Nations is holding a special meeting today devoted to a health issue: This time, on the rise of untreatable infections that is being propelled by the way drugs are overused and misused in both people and animals.

Health experts long have worried about the issue, but it is getting more alarming because germs are getting more difficult to treat, few new antibiotics are being developed and the problem appears to be global already.

"We believe it's probably everywhere," said Dr. Keiji Fukuda of the World Health Organization, of the resistance to drugs.

Here's more on the issue, and why world leaders believe it's so important.

What's the problem?

Germs have higher chances of developing resistance to a drug if the drug is not used prop-

erly. If a drug is not used long enough or taken for the wrong reason, or if low levels of the drug are common in the environment, the germs can survive and adapt.

Doctors are already facing situations in which they are helpless against infections that used to be easily treated with antibiotics, Fukuda said. All types of microbes, including bacteria, viruses and fungi have been shrugging off attacks from the medicines designed to stop them. Experts estimate that 700,000 people die around the world each year from drug-resistant germs, and they expect the number to grow sharply.

Dr. Tom Frieden, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said the problem also may affect doctors' willingness to do chemotherapy, organ transplants, or other treatments that might put a patient at risk of uncontrollable infections. "It can undermine modern medicine," he said.

Why are these drugs overused?

Often because of good intentions and bad decisions. For example, antibiotics don't work against viral illnesses like colds and flu. But doctors often prescribe them anyway to patients looking for some kind of treatment for their respiratory infections, experts say. Companies that raise livestock routinely prescribe antibiotics to try to stave off costly infections in herds and flocks.

Why so few new antibiotics?

A major reason is that it is very hard for drug-makers to earn any money selling new antibiotics, so they don't want to spend the money needed to develop them. Patients don't need to be on antibiotics for very long, which means they won't be buying large amounts of the drug. And doctors are likely to prescribe any new antibiotics only in cases where older, cheaper ones don't work first.

Why now?

One factor is that world leaders are starting to worry about the economic threats from the problem. A 2014 report commissioned by the United Kingdom projected that by 2050 it will kill more

people each year than cancer and cost the world as much as \$100 trillion in lost economic output.

The World Bank this week released a report saying drug-resistant infections have the potential to cause at least as much economic damage as the 2008 financial crisis.

What can the U.N. do?

For now, just draw more attention to the problem. That's what happened on the three other occasions the U.N. held a special session on a health issue — on the AIDS virus in 2001, on non-communicable diseases in 2011, and on Ebola in 2014.

The U.N. will adopt a declaration that endorses an action plan approved last year by an international meeting of health ministers. The declaration recognizes the size of the problem and encourages countries to come up with plans — and money — to cut back on antibiotic use, make better use of vaccines to prevent infections in the first place, and fund development of new drugs.

"We need new antibiotics, but in all likelihood we're not going to invent our way out of this," Frieden said.

Some fast-food chains serve the meat, hold the antibiotics

Geoffrey Mohan | Los Angeles Times

Panera Bread and Chipotle Mexican Grill passed with flying colors, but KFC and Olive Garden were among the laggards in commitments to eliminate medically important antibiotics from their meat and poultry supply chains, according to a new report.

Strong progress nonetheless was made across the top 25 fast-food and casual dining retailers, suggesting that public pressure has helped slow the meat and poultry industry's routine use of antibiotics that are critical to human health, according to the report released Tuesday by five consumer, environmental and public health groups.

"I think it shows consumers are driving change in how meat is produced," said the

report's lead author, Sasha Stashwick, senior advocate for food and agriculture at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Routinely feeding antibiotics to animals raised for food has been linked to the surge in resistant strains of bacteria that cause human illnesses, which adds about 23,000 additional deaths annually and boosts health care costs by \$55 million, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Subway, which last year received an F rating in the report's inaugural edition, rose to a B for its commitment announced earlier this year to eliminate antibiotics across its entire menu. Last year, the restaurant chain did not even respond to the survey and did not offer public details of its antibiotics policies, the groups reported. Starbucks, which again earned an F rating, has maintained a similar silence for two years running.

McDonald's rose a half grade, to C-plus in the wake of its decision earlier this year to eliminate

antibiotics from its chicken supply.

McDonald's and Subway stand out as exceptions, said Kari Hamerschlag, deputy director of the food and technology program at Friends of the Earth, which helped compile the report.

KFC and Olive Garden restaurants drew particular criticism for policies that effectively still allowed antibiotics to be abused, the groups said.

KFC, owned by Yum Brands, has said that it abides by the federal Food and Drug Administration guidelines, which discourage drug companies from labeling their antibiotics as appropriate for enhancing animal growth. By next year, the company said, "antibiotics important in human medicine will only be used to maintain chicken health, and only under the supervision and prescription of a licensed veterinarian."

A KFC spokesperson said the company's antibiotics policy "is currently being reviewed to determine the viability for our suppliers to go beyond the FDA guidelines for antibiotics usage."

Activists say those voluntary guidelines allow food companies to continue feeding the same antibiotics under the guise of disease prevention.

Darden Restaurants Inc., which owns the Olive Garden chain, "has been misleading the public and shareholders about their antibiotics policy," through that animal-health loophole, Hamerschlag said.

Officials from Darden were not immediately available for comment.

Activists estimate that about 40 percent of the chicken supply chain is or soon will be free of antibiotics that are important to human health. A commitment by KFC, said Stashwick, "could tip the industry over the 50 percent mark."

Besides KFC and Olive Garden, companies that received Fs this year were Applebee's, Arby's, Buffalo Wild Wings, Burger King, Chili's, Dairy Queen, Denny's, Domino's, Dunkin' Donuts, IHOP, Jack in the Box, Little Caesars, Sonic and Starbucks.

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SPECIAL ADVERTISING FEATURE

Why dental hygiene is essential for overall health

Metro Creative

The importance of maintaining clean teeth and healthy gums goes beyond having fresh breath and a white smile. Many people are surprised to discover that oral hygiene plays an integral role in overall health.

Research indicates that oral health mirrors the condition of the body as a whole. Also, regular dental visits can alert dentists about overall health and pinpoint if a person is at a risk for chronic disease. An oral health check-up also may be the first indication of a potential health issue not yet evident to a general medical doctor.

Heart disease

According to the Academy of General Dentistry, there is a distinct relationship between periodontal disease and conditions such as heart disease and stroke. Joint teams at the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom and the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin, Ireland, found that people with bleeding gums from poor dental hygiene could have an increased risk of heart disease. Bacteria from the mouth is able to enter the bloodstream when bleeding gums are present. That bacteria can stick to platelets and subsequently form blood clots. This interrupts the flow of blood to the heart and may trigger a heart attack. Brushing and flossing twice daily and rinsing with mouthwash can remove bacteria and keep gums healthy.

Facial pain

The Office of the Surgeon General says infections of the gums that support the teeth can lead to facial and oral pain. Gingivitis, which is an early stage of gum disease, as well as advanced gum



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The health of teeth and gums can impact other parts of the body.

disease, affects more than 75 percent of the American population.

Dental decay can lead to its own share of pain. Maintaining a healthy mouth can fend off decay and infections, thereby preventing pain.

Pancreatic cancer

In 2007, the Harvard School of Public Health reported a link between gum disease and pancreatic cancer. In the ongoing

study, 51,000 men were followed and data was collected beginning in 1986. The Harvard researchers found that men with a history of gum disease had a 64 percent increased risk of pancreatic cancer compared with men who had never had gum disease. The greatest risk for pancreatic cancer among this group was in men with recent tooth loss. However, the study was unable to find links between other types of oral health problems, such as tooth decay, and pancreatic cancer.

Alzheimer's disease

Various health ailments, including poor oral health, have been linked to a greater risk of developing Alzheimer's disease. In 2010, after reviewing 20 years' worth of data, researchers from New York University concluded that there is a link between gum inflammation and Alzheimer's disease. Follow-up studies from researchers at the University of Central Lancashire in the United Kingdom compared brain samples from 10 living patients with Alzheimer's to samples from 10 people who did not have the disease. Data indicated that a bacterium - Porphyromonas gingivalis - was present in the Alzheimer's brain samples but not in the samples from the brains of people who did not have Alzheimer's. P. gingivalis is usually associated with chronic gum disease. As a result of the study, experts think that the bacteria can move via nerves in the roots of teeth that connect directly with the brain or through bleeding gums.

These health conditions are just a sampling of the relationship between oral health and overall health. Additional connections also have been made and continue to be studied.

Down syndrome myths debunked

Metro Creative

Down syndrome is a chromosomal disorder that is caused by an error in cell division. When a person has Down syndrome, he or she has a third chromosome 21, also called Trisomy 21. This extra chromosome causes intellectual disability and medical problems.

According to the Down Syndrome Association of Greater Charlotte, Down syndrome occurs in one out of every 691 live births and across all races and economic groups. Even though Down syndrome was first documented by physician John Langdon Down in 1866, the cause of the disorder was not discovered until 1959. Since 1959, much progress has been made in understanding

Down syndrome. In spite of that progress, some myths about the disorder still prevail.

Myth: Down syndrome is rare.

Fact: Down syndrome is the most commonly occurring chromosomal condition.

Today, there are approximately 400,000 people living with the condition in the United States.

Myth: Children with Down syndrome are only born to older mothers.

Fact: While the likelihood of giving birth to a baby with Down syndrome increases with age, more babies with the disorder are born to mothers under the age of 35 than those older than 35. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 80 percent of children who have Down syndrome are born to

women younger than 35.

Myth: Down syndrome always will be detrimental to families.

Fact: A study published in the American Association of Intellectual Disabilities indicates that divorce rates are lower in families of children with Down syndrome. What's more, another study published in the Journal of Intellectual Disability Research found no long-term detrimental effects to siblings.

Myth: Down syndrome is a hereditary condition.

Fact: Only one type of Down syndrome is hereditary. This type, called, translocation, only accounts for 3 to 4 percent of all cases.

Myth: Those with Down syndrome die very young.

Fact: Although it is true that people with Down syndrome on average do not live as long as others who do not have the disorder, the average life expectancy for people with Down syndrome is nearly 60. Some people with Down syndrome have lived into their 80s.

Myth: Babies with Down syndrome cannot be breastfed.

Fact: Some children can feed despite their low muscle tone, larger tongues and tiredness resulting in associated medical conditions.

Myth: People with Down syndrome can't go to regular schools.

Fact: It may be advisable for children with Down syndrome to attend school with their peers regardless of their dis-

ability. Research shows children with Down syndrome are capable of learning to read and write, and engaging in other academic pursuits when teachers are well-trained and have high expectations of all students.

Myth: All people with Down syndrome will develop

Alzheimer's Disease.

Fact: Numerous studies have shown that virtually 100 percent of people with Down syndrome will have the plaques and tangles in the brain associated with Alzheimer's disease but not necessarily the actual symptomatic disease, offers the Global Down Syndrome Foundation.

Down syndrome is a common condition surrounded by misinformation.

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