

AAP Highlights Danger to Kids From Antibiotics Use in Food Producing Animals

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In a new technical report, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) says unnecessary use of antibiotics in food-producing animals is endangering medicine's ability to treat life-threatening infections in young patients.

The report, "[Nontherapeutic Use of Antimicrobial Agents in Animal Agriculture: Implications for Pediatrics](#)," calls antimicrobial drug resistance a growing public health crisis and points to a common farming practice as a contributing cause. According to the AAP, adding antibiotics to the feed of healthy livestock to promote growth, increase feed efficiency or prevent disease among herds in crowded conditions often leaves the drugs ineffective when they are needed to treat infections in people.

More than 2 million Americans become ill with antimicrobial-resistant infections each year, with more than 23,000 resulting deaths, according to the federal statistics cited in report. For most types of infections reported to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network in 2013, the highest incidence was among children younger than 5 years old.

"Children can be exposed to multiple-drug resistant bacteria, which are extremely difficult to treat if they cause an infection, through contact with animals given antibiotics and through consuming the meat of those animals," said lead author Jerome A. Paulson, MD, FAAP, the AAP's immediate past chair of the executive committee of the Council on Environmental Health.

"Like humans, farm animals should receive appropriate antibiotics for bacterial infections," Dr. Paulson said. "However, the indiscriminate use of antibiotics without a prescription or the input of a veterinarian puts the health of children at risk."

The AAP report stresses the importance of preserving antibiotics to treat illness in humans and animals. The authors express concern that a voluntary Food and Drug Administration initiative and measures proposed by members of Congress to reduce the drugs' nontherapeutic use have met with opposition from the agriculture and farming industry. The report will appear in the December 2015 issue of Pediatrics (published online Nov. 16).

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