

The Honorable Louise M. Slaughter
Statement for the Congressional Record
March 14, 2013

Introduction of the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act of 2013

M. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act of 2013. We are on the verge of losing one of the greatest medical advancements in history, the development of antibiotics, by wasting them on healthy animals.

Antibiotic resistance is a major public health crisis. Every year, two million Americans acquire bacterial infections during a stay in a hospital or long-term care facility. In the past, these infections were easily cleared with antibiotics. Now, as many as 100,000 people will die each year from these infections because 70 percent of them are resistant to one or more of the drugs commonly used to treat them. Alarming, multidrug-resistant bacteria, called CRE, have recently been found in 1 in 20 American hospitals and 1 in 6 long-term care facilities. These “nightmare bacteria,” so termed by Centers for Disease Control Director Dr. Thomas Frieden, are resistant to all antibiotics, including our antibiotics of last resort. A full 50% of patients who get sick with these infections will die.

As Dr. Frieden recently warned, “we have a limited window of opportunity” to fix this problem. In many cases, even “our strongest antibiotics don’t work and patients are left with potentially untreatable infections.” We must act now to ensure that antibiotics are not being made obsolete.

Yet, in a time when our most important medicines should be preserved and protected, they are routinely used in massive and indiscriminant quantities in agriculture, with little oversight. These precious resources are used at sub-therapeutic levels on healthy animals as a way to compensate for crowded and unsanitary living conditions or to promote growth. According to an analysis by the Food and Drug Administration, 13.5 million kilograms of antibiotics were sold for use in livestock and poultry in 2010, compared to 3.3 million kilograms sold for use in humans. It is unacceptable that 80 percent of the antibiotics sold in this country are used in agriculture on otherwise healthy animals, rather than being preserved for the treatment of critical human illnesses.

The overuse of antibiotics in agriculture has been conclusively shown to harm human health. A 2002 publication in the *Clinical Infectious Diseases* journal analyzing more than 500 scientific articles concluded that “many lines of evidence link antimicrobial resistant human infections to food-borne pathogens of animal origin.” In fact, the Food and Drug Administration acknowledged the threat of antibiotic resistant disease and called for a reduction in the use of antibiotics in agriculture, in 1977. Yet, despite nearly 40 years of evidence, there has still not been any substantive action to halt the abuse of antibiotics.

For this reason, I am again introducing the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act. This legislation would phase out the use of the eight classes of medically important antibiotics that are currently approved for non-therapeutic use in animal agriculture. The bill clearly defines the term “non-therapeutic use” to ensure that sick animals may be appropriately treated, but that any use of medically important antibiotics outside of treatment of a sick animal is not permitted.

Penicillins are commonly used to treat illnesses from routine cases of strep throat to highly dangerous and infectious meningitis. Tetracyclines are used to treat people exposed to anthrax. Macrolides and sulfonamides are used to treat pneumonia in HIV-infected patients. We must maintain these weapons in our arsenal against illness, or we will soon find ourselves in circumstances such as those described when World Health Organization Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan warned that "Things as common as strep throat or a child's scratched knee could once again kill."

When we go to the grocery store to pick up dinner, we should be able to buy our food without the worry that eating it will expose our family to potentially deadly bacteria that will no longer respond to our medical treatments. Unless we act now, we will unwittingly be permitting animals to serve as incubators for resistant bacteria.

It is time for Congress to stand with scientists, the World Health Organization, the American Medical Association, and the National Academy of Sciences to do something to stop the spread of antibiotic resistant bacteria. Protecting the public's health is one of the greatest responsibilities of this body. I urge my colleagues to stand with me to support The Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act.