Joint call for urgent action to address the antimicrobial resistance crisis

Bacterial resistance to antimicrobials – particularly antibiotics - is one of the greatest threats to public health today. If the problem of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) continues to worsen, it will - in effect - result in a return to the pre-antibiotic era, where a bacterial infection from a simple operation or even a scratch could result in the loss of a limb or the loss of a life. In order to maintain the effectiveness of antimicrobials, we need to seriously reduce their usage.
This means severely restricting the following practices:

The unnecessary prescribing of antibiotics in human medicine

- Australians are amongst the highest users of antibiotics in the world, with over 22 million prescriptions issued every year – more than one for each man, woman and child.
- ***The solutions***:
    - Changes to the regulatory system to reduce inappropriate usage of antibiotics.
    - Better education programs to prevent the unnecessary use of antibiotics, such as usage to treat cold and flu viruses.

The widespread use of antibiotics in agriculture

- Many farmers are still using antibiotics to improve meat production with limited monitoring of the presence of antibiotic resistant bacteria through the food chain. Excessive use of antibiotics in the agricultural sector can breed superbugs, which can reduce the effectiveness of antibiotics for both animals and humans.
- ***The solution***: Tighter monitoring and enforcement of use of antibiotics in agriculture, with a view to banning non-therapeutic use of antibiotics if industry compliance is poor.

The unnecessary use of antimicrobials in consumer goods

- There is evidence that the growing use of consumer goods containing antimicrobials such as triclosan and nano-silver may breed superbugs in our homes, and ultimately reduce the effectiveness of the important uses of these antimicrobials in hospitals.
- ***The solution***: Restrict the use of these powerful antimicrobials to clinical applications.

Proper regulation of antimicrobials has been proven to lead to lower levels of antimicrobial resistance. For example, Sweden has some of the lowest levels of AMR in the world, thanks to massive education and surveillance programs. Essential steps to reduce AMR must include an ongoing long-term national surveillance and monitoring system of use and resistance to antimicrobials, in both humans and animals.

The following organisations call on the Australian Government to take urgent decisive action to address this looming public health crisis.

Friends of the Earth Australia

Public Health Association AUSTRALIA

NTN NATIONAL TOXICS NETWORK

The Australia Institute
Research that matters.