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Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria Has Emerged as a Foodborne Hazard, Says CSPI

WASHINGTON—Foodborne illnesses due to antibiotic-resistant bacteria have been occurring since the 1970s, according to a recent study by the Center for Science in the Public Interest, which signals that antibiotics used on the farm may be causing more serious pathogens in the nation's food supply. CSPI's analysis shows a steady increase of such outbreaks in every decade since the 1970s, though that may be due to increased testing and reporting, the group said. In its study of 35 documented outbreaks, raw milk, raw milk cheeses and ground beef appeared to carry the resistant pathogens most frequently.

"Outbreaks from antibiotic resistant strains of *Salmonella*, though rare, can not be ignored by our food safety regulators. The problem has clearly emerged with respect to some high risk foods," said CSPI food safety director Caroline Smith DeWaal. "Both humans and animals rely on antibiotics to stay healthy. But overuse in some sectors may squander their effectiveness and leave consumer vulnerable to hard-to-treat foodborne infections."

Multi-drug resistance was found in 10 out of 14 outbreaks of antibiotic-resistant foodborne illness reported between 2000 and 2009, according to the study. CSPI says the problem of antibiotic-resistant bacteria needs much greater scrutiny by federal government if antibiotics are to remain effective in treating human and veterinary illnesses. Cataloging outbreaks of foodborne illness and then testing the pathogens for antibiotic resistance is a critical step if policymakers are to document the link between antibiotic use on farms animals and human illness from antibiotic-resistant bacteria, the group says.

Antibiotic resistance is an inevitable consequence of antibiotic use, according to the CSPI report. The more antibiotics are used, the more bacteria will develop resistance. Patients who develop an infection from antibiotic-resistant bacteria are more likely to have longer and more expensive hospitalizations and increased mortality. And, the antibiotics that finally do provide successful treatment to resistant bacteria can be more toxic to humans, with more serious side effects than common antibiotics.

CSPI presented its findings at a one-day conference it cosponsored with the Pew Charitable Trusts, *Managing the Risk of Foodborne Hazards: STECs and Antibiotic-Resistant Pathogens*. Besides DeWaal, other presenters at the conference included the USDA Undersecretary for Food Safety Elisabeth Hagen, FDA Deputy Commissioner for Foods Michael Taylor, Patricia Griffin from the CDC, and Danilo Lo Fo Wong from the World Health Organization.

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