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Pew Applauds FDA Measure to Preserve Effectiveness of Critical Antibiotics

WASHINGTON – The Pew Campaign on Human Health and Industrial Farming today praised the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for limiting the use of cephalosporins in food animal production.

Cephalosporins are vital treatments for children suffering from infection; unlike other antibiotics, such as fluoroquinolones and tetracyclines, they carry no warnings or precautions for pediatric use. They also are important medicines for treating people suffering from bacterial meningitis and infections of the bone, urinary tract, and upper respiratory system, as well as those associated with cancer.

“We applaud FDA’s move,” said Laura Rogers, project director of the Pew Campaign on Human Health and Industrial Farming. “This restriction is a victory for human health, as it will help ensure we can still rely on cephalosporins to treat life-threatening infections today and in the future.”

Although FDA has approved cephalosporins to treat some infections in food animals, the drugs often are administered in ways not specifically approved by the agency. Its rule will apply to such extralabel use of cephalosporins in meat and poultry production, which multiple studies have linked to the emergence of cephalosporin-resistant bacteria that can infect people.

If cephalosporins continue to be overused on industrial farms, these drugs will lose their effectiveness. As a result, many human infections will become more difficult to treat, leading to more deaths and higher health care costs.

“Today’s action is a good first step,” added Ms. Rogers, “and we encourage FDA to issue guidelines expeditiously that restrict the overuse and misuse of other critical antibiotics on industrial farms.”

Last year, officials from FDA, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention testified before Congress that there was a definitive link between the use of antibiotics in food animal production and the crisis of antibiotic resistance in humans. In addition, many medical organizations including the American Medical Association, the American

Academy of Pediatrics, and the World Health Organization warn that this practice is putting human health at risk.

To ensure additional human antibiotics work when we need them, the Pew Campaign on Human Health and Industrial Farming also urges Congress to pass the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act (H.R. 965, S. 1211).

A 60-day public comment will follow FDA's announcement, during which Pew will submit a formal response to the agency.

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The Pew Campaign on Human Health and Industrial Farming is working to save antibiotics by phasing out the overuse of the drugs in food animal production. We work with public health leaders, veterinarians, agricultural interests, academics, and citizens groups who share our objective of preserving the integrity of antibiotics as a means of protecting human and animal health. Learn more and get involved at www.saveantibiotics.org.