



Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria Found in Majority of Supermarket Meat

By
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Roughly 75 percent of the meat sold at grocery stores in the United States contains antibiotic-resistant bacteria, aka superbugs, according to a [new report](#) by the Environmental Working Group, a consumer advocacy and research nonprofit.

Sound familiar? EWG first warned of these superbugs—and the serious public health threat they pose—in 2013. Not only does the problem persist, the prevalence of superbugs in pork chops and ground beef has actually increased. That's in large part because factory farms continue to abuse antibiotics, says Dawn Undurruga, EWG nutritionist and author of the report. Producers feed the drugs to farm animals not to treat bacterial infections but to promote growth, prevent disease, and compensate for cramped, unsanitary living conditions.

“Penicillin is the second most used type of antibiotic on the farm, even though the World Health Organization has designated penicillins as ‘critically important’ antibiotics for use in human medicine,” notes Undurruga. “The type of penicillin that is used on the farm, amoxicillin, is the same one we give to our kids to treat ear and respiratory infections. It's the No. 1 antibiotic given to kids each year, and we're squandering it by using it on the farm.”

In fact, the vast majority of antibiotics sold in the U.S. are given to farm animals, not people. Why is this so dangerous? Antibiotics typically kill most bacteria, but not all, leaving behind antibiotic-resistant superbugs that can spread foodborne illnesses and other diseases—all while transferring their antibiotic-resistance genes to their offspring and to other bacteria in the environment, creating even more superbugs. This in turn can lead to antibiotics losing effectiveness and infections becoming harder to treat. The Centers for Disease Control [estimate](#) that antibiotic-resistant bacteria infect more than 2 million people every year and cause at least 23,000 of them to die.

While the Food and Drug Administration introduced a [plan](#) in 2013 urging pharmaceutical companies to stop selling antibiotics for the use of growth promotion in

farm animals, Undurruga stresses the need to do more: The latest statistics show that 87 percent of the bacteria found on ground turkey products are resistant to tetracyclines, a type of antibiotic that's used to treat human ear infections, bronchitis, pneumonia, urinary tract infections, chlamydia, and more. One in five strains of salmonella found on grocery store chicken are resistant to amoxicillin, which, in addition to being prescribed annually to more than 18 million children, is one of the only antibiotics available to treat salmonella poisoning in pregnant women.

Taking up the fight against antibiotic resistance in your own daily life can be as simple as avoiding unnecessary use of antibiotics and, even better, transitioning to a [whole-food, plant-based diet](#). However, you'll still be at risk for picking up superbugs (which can get transported off farms via meat, farm workers, soil, air, or water) until there's a significant policy change: “Despite growing awareness, the FDA has chosen to bury its head in the sand; it has not issued any rules to deter the industry, instead opting for voluntary guidance,” says Undurruga, who advocates for the World Health Organization [recommendations](#) to get medically important antibiotics off of factory farms. “Other developed countries such as Sweden, Denmark, and the United Kingdom have successfully [banned nonessential farm use of various antibiotics](#), and there is no reason that the U.S. could not do the same.”