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New Study Strengthens Link between Antibiotic Overuse in Food Animals and Dangerous Complications of Food Poisoning

Study Finds Strong Association between Antibiotic-Resistant Salmonella and Potentially Deadly Bloodstream Infections

Chicago, IL - A new report concludes that patients with antibiotic-resistant infections caused by *Salmonella* bacteria are more likely to suffer potentially deadly bloodstream infections than are patients with non-resistant *Salmonella*. *Salmonella*, a leading bacterial cause of food poisoning, is responsible for 1.4 million food poisoning cases and about 500 deaths per year. The study, published in the Feb. 15 issue of the *Journal of Infectious Diseases*, notes that the antibiotic resistance in *Salmonella* bacteria chiefly results from using antibiotics in food animals

(www.journals.uchicago.edu/JID/journal/issues/v191n4/33237/brief/33237.abstract.html).

“This study drives home the health consequences of *Salmonella* bacteria becoming more resistant to antibiotics,” said David Wallinga, M.D., a physician with the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy. “Of course, treating these increasingly resistant bugs helps drive healthcare costs skyward as well.”

The researchers looked at patients with food poisoning caused by *Salmonella*, including those infected by a particular type, *Salmonella typhimurium*. Among the latter, researchers found that patients infected by antibiotic-resistant *Salmonella* were much more likely to suffer severe complications such as bloodstream infections and to require hospitalization than were patients whose *Salmonella* infections were not resistant. Infections of the bloodstream can lead to meningitis, sepsis (overwhelming infection leading to shock and multiple organ failure) and death.

“This study shows that resistant bacteria not only result in harder to treat infections, but also make people sicker in the first place” said Margaret Mellon, J.D., Ph.D., director of the Food and Environment Program at the Union of Concerned Scientists. “Added to the many other studies linking antibiotic overuse in animal agriculture to human health problems, this study underscores the urgent need to reduce the massive overuse of antibiotics in animal agriculture in order to protect human health.”

The large-scale, industrialized operations that dominate meat production in the U.S. today routinely feed poultry, swine and beef cattle the same types of antibiotics that doctors use in human medicine, such as sulfa drugs and penicillins. Massive quantities of these medically important antibiotics – an estimated 13 million pounds each year – are used as animal feed additives. These antibiotic feed additives are not used to treat sick animals, but for growth promotion and to compensate for the stressful and crowded conditions within the industrial animal operations.

“This study gives Congress yet another compelling reason to pass bipartisan legislation to phase out the use of antibiotics that are important in human medicine as animal feed additives,” concluded Wallinga. “Phase-out legislation introduced last session was endorsed by the American Medical Association and over 100 other medical groups.”