



World Health
Organization

Western Pacific

Countries race against the clock to overcome antimicrobial resistance (AMR)

Joint news release by FAO, OIE and WHO

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*Dr Nguyen Thi Kim Tien, Minister of Health, Viet Nam, shows an online activity done for WAAW 2015 to Dr Lokky Wai, WHO Representative in Viet Nam.
WHO/Luong Thai Linh*

Representatives from countries in Asia and the Pacific have pledged to take immediate action to combat the spread of antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

The pledge was made with the support and collaboration of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the World Health Organization (WHO). It reaffirms a wider commitment to combat AMR and increase awareness about the scale of the problem in order to stop the emergence and accelerating misuse of antimicrobial medicines in humans and animals.

AMR occurs when microorganisms develop resistance to antimicrobials, and makes illnesses of humans and animals harder to treat. Overuse and misuse of antimicrobials in both, as well as in plants, are causing an increase in cases of AMR globally. When occurring in farm animals, where farmers often routinely give antibiotics to their livestock, such resistance can be transferred to humans through the food chain or other routes.

Earlier this year, the O'Neill Report, commissioned by the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, declared that action to fight AMR was needed immediately in order to head off a human death toll in Asia of up to 5 million annually by 2050.

The issue is so serious that, in September, the United Nations General Assembly recognized this immense threat and mobilized a global response and joint action through the United Nations specialized agencies and others.

Serious threat to health - and joint efforts to stop it

This week is recognized as **World Antibiotic Awareness Week**. It is promoted by FAO, OIE and WHO. The tripartite group has jointly reiterated its strong commitment to supporting worldwide efforts to curbing the effects of AMR. The FAO-OIE-WHO collaboration hopes to consolidate efforts to support the establishment of policies and institutional and regulatory frameworks to combat AMR across Asia and the Pacific.

The agencies aim to raise awareness about the effects of AMR on humans, animals and the environment, focusing on encouraging public and animal health professionals, including pharmacists and veterinarians, to prescribe or dispense antibiotics more cautiously. FAO-OIE-WHO have agreed to pursue a 'One Health' approach that aims to fight AMR and other common and emerging threats to all lifeforms.

"AMR is important to you, your family, your community and everyone else on the planet," said FAO's Chief Veterinary Officer Juan Lubroth, emphasizing the threat AMR poses to both public and animal health by making disease treatment longer and more expensive.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the three agencies are already working together and they are making headway.

“The strong partnership among FAO, OIE and WHO is a good foundation to assist countries to establish harmonized AMR surveillance and documentation of antimicrobial usage in Asia while taking corrective actions,” said Kundhavi Kadiresan, Assistant Director-General and FAO Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific.

“The three organizations collaborate closely at global and regional level to help their member countries implement sustainable changes in their use of antimicrobials, in particular through the implementation of OIE international standards. To achieve such a change of practices, inter-sectoral coordination between the public health and veterinary sectors is essential to lead member countries to take harmonised actions and long term commitments against antimicrobial resistance,” said Hirofumi Kugita, OIE Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific.

“Cooperation between human health, animal health and environmental health sectors is of critical importance to address AMR. This mechanism should be established both within countries and between countries, as we strive to protect the health of people in our countries, regions and at the global level, said Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, WHO Regional Director for South-East Asia.

“We must ensure that all countries follow multisectoral 'One Health' strategies with strong national action plans and coordination across all sectors, including veterinary medicine, agriculture and human health to preserve the effectiveness of these lifesaving medicines,” said Dr Shin Young-soo, WHO Regional Director for the Western Pacific.

The three agencies have stressed that, in order to avoid an international catastrophe, this global collaboration will need to be accompanied by political will and affirmative action.