

Questions raised on Antibiotics - September 2014

Meat: Antibiotics

House of Lords

26th September 2014



Lord Swinfen (Conservative)

To ask **Her Majesty's** Government what steps they are taking to reduce the amount of antibiotics in meat and meat products.



Lord de Mauley (Conservative)

Any veterinary antibiotic authorised for use in the **UK** in a food producing species will have a withdrawal period set as part of the condition of use. This is the minimum length of time after treatment that must pass before produce from the treated animal can enter the food chain. The withdrawal period ensures that the concentration of any residue of the medicine falls below the maximum residue level – the statutory safety limit.

In addition, the use of antibiotics as growth promoters has been banned in Europe since 2006.

Using antibiotics responsibly is a requirement of the **Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS)** Code of Professional Conduct for Vets which states “**Veterinary surgeons** must be seen to ensure that when using antimicrobials they do so responsibly, and be accountable for the choices made in such use.”

Antibiotics

House of Lords

26th September 2014



Lord Empey (UUP)

To ask **Her Majesty's** Government what assessment they have made of the risk to public health of the antibiotic-resistant bacteria recently discovered in riverbeds downstream from sewage works.



Earl Howe (Conservative)

Professor Wellington's paper was co-authored by Professor Peter Hawkey, one of **Public Health England's (PHE)** Lead Microbiologists. Investigating the presence of extended-spectrum β -lactamases (ESBLs) and other antimicrobial resistance genes in

the environment is part of PHE's antimicrobial resistance research programme. Few studies address the presence of ESBLs in the environment and assessing the level of public health risk is not easy.

PHE is assessing the occurrence of **ESBL**-producing *E. coli* from a variety of non-human sources, including sewage (but not river waters), to identify major reservoirs of the strains that cause human disease and to inform public health risk assessment. This Policy Research Programme-funded project will produce its final report in 2016.

Professor Wellington also reports the first carbapenem-resistant *E. coli* from a United Kingdom river. Carbapenem resistance is considered a critical resistance threat by PHE, the **Chief Medical Officer**, the Department and the **World Health Organization**. Although carbapenem resistance rates in the **UK** are low, the actual number of carbapenem-resistant bacteria seen by PHE from hospitals is increasing year on year. A member of PHE recently reviewed the small but growing number of reports from around the world of carbapenem-resistant strains from non-human sources in collaboration with colleagues from the **Animal Health** and **Veterinary Laboratories Agency** and the **National Health Service**.

The key public health message arising from the latest paper by Professor Wellington's team is that members of the public should always inform their general practice that they've been swimming in rivers/streams if they become ill (most likely with gastro symptoms).