Communication

Press release

Urgent action needed to safeguard the effectiveness of antibiotics

Stockholm, 18 November 2026 - With mounting evidence that antibiotic-resistant bacteria are continuing to spread and treatment options are becoming increasingly limited, urgent action is needed to safeguard the effectiveness of antibiotics, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) said on the occasion of European Antibiotic Awareness Day.

"We are still behind with several of the EU's 2030 targets to counter antimicrobial resistance. However, the good news is that we can now look beyond just numbers," said ECDC Director Pamela Rendi-Wagner. "Innovations such as faster genomic surveillance mean that we can now assess better and more rapidly how resistant bacteria spread and how they evade antibiotics. This in turn means we can act sooner to stop transmission, more effectively guide treatment decisions, and identify where new antibiotics are most urgently needed."

ECDC coordinates three European networks collecting data on antimicrobial resistance and consumption. One specifically carries out genomic-based surveillance of multidrug-resistant bacteria and works to determine the geographical distribution and the genetic relatedness of multidrug-resistant clones, as well as the mechanisms of their resistance. This helps to improve risk assessment, guidance, and treatment selection, and in this way enables countries to translate surveillance data into targeted public health action.

While increases in infections with resistant bacteria have been observed for many pathogens, certain bacteria are of particular concern due to their spread in healthcare facilities, their capacity to cause severe infections, and their increased resistance to nearly all antibiotics. One example is *Klebsiella pneumoniae* resistant to carbapenems, a class of antibiotics reserved for the treatment of severe infections. This type of bacteria has accounted for a 72% increase in bloodstream infections since 2019, which can cause serious illness and is linked to a high mortality rate.

At the same time, 90% of all human antibiotic consumption occurs in the community or outpatient sector, and for this reason ECDC's 2026 campaign is focusing on children, who are often exposed to antibiotics. The campaign theme 'Care for your kids – use antibiotics wisely' reminds parents and caregivers that many common childhood illnesses, such as colds, coughs and sore throats, are caused by viruses and do not require antibiotics. Antibiotics should be used only when prescribed by a healthcare professional, and when medically necessary.

Recent data indicate some positive developments in the reduction of antimicrobial consumption. However, Europe is currently not on track to reach its 2030 targets*:

- antibiotic consumption in humans was 5% lower in 2025 than in 2019, against a reduction target of 20% by 2030;

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- the proportion of first-line antibiotics listed by the World Health Organization (WHO)* increased from 61.1% to 62.5%, approaching the 65% target;
- bloodstream infections caused by meticillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) have decreased by 19% since 2019, in line with the EU target, although increases in the past two years are now threatening this progress;
- bloodstream infections caused by carbapenem-resistant *K. pneumoniae* have increased by 72% against the 5% reduction target;
- bloodstream infections caused by third-generation cephalosporin-resistant *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*) have risen by 16.4%, despite a target of 10% reduction. The increased reporting of carbapenem-resistant *E. coli* infections, not only in healthcare settings but also in the community, is an additional challenge.

Reversing these negative trends and achieving the antimicrobial resistance targets by 2030 will require swift and sustained action by public health authorities, including a coordinated package of infection prevention and control (IPC) measures, antimicrobial stewardship, laboratory capacity, and strengthened surveillance.

At the point of care, priority measures include reliable hand hygiene, correct use of personal protective equipment, timely identification and isolation of affected patients, and effective environmental cleaning and disinfection. Healthcare managers and health systems must support these practices through adequate IPC staffing, access to adequate laboratory diagnostics, sufficient isolation capacity, surveillance, training, and mechanisms for coordination between healthcare facilities and regions.

ECDC encourages all countries to strengthen national coordination in order to prevent multidrug-resistant organisms. In 2026, the Centre published proposed guidance on establishing and implementing IPC programmes in healthcare facilities and introduced the hyFive digital tool to support hand-hygiene monitoring and data-driven implementation. Between 2024 and 2026, ECDC also conducted country visits in all Member States and provided tailored recommendations for AMR and healthcare-associated infections.

***Note to editors:**

A Council Recommendation adopted on 13 June 2023 outlines five targets related to antimicrobial consumption and resistance to be reached by the EU and individual Member States by 2030, with 2019 as the baseline year.

EU Targets

- Reduce the total consumption of antibiotics in humans by 20%.
- At least 65% of the total consumption of antibiotics in humans comes from the 'Access' group of antibiotics in each country, as defined in WHO's AWaRe classification.
- Reduce the total incidence of bloodstream infections with:
  - meticillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) by 15%;
  - third-generation cephalosporin-resistant *Escherichia coli (E. coli)* by 10%;
  - carbapenem-resistant *Klebsiella pneumoniae* (*K. pneumoniae*) by 5%.

ECDC supports countries across the region by monitoring antimicrobial resistance through EARS-Net, antimicrobial consumption through ESAC-Net, and the genomic-based surveillance of multidrug-resistant bacteria of public health importance through EURGen-Net.

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