

Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA)
Summary of Existing Policy on the Use of Antimicrobial Drugs in Food Animals

IDSA supports efforts to phase out the use of antimicrobial drugs for growth promotion, feed efficiency, and routine disease prevention in food animals, and to require that all other uses of these drugs, which are highly valued in human medicine, be carried out under the supervision of a veterinarian and within the boundaries of a valid veterinarian-client-patient relationship. For this reason, IDSA has endorsed both the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act (H.R. 1549 and S. 619) and the Food and Drug Administration's recently articulated "public health approach" to antimicrobial use in animals. Such policies may end the over-the-counter sale and non-judicious use of tons of antimicrobial drugs annually. In order to be protective of public health, we also support efforts to clearly define the limited instances where antimicrobials may be used judiciously in food animals for purposes of disease prevention and control. Development and implementation of these policies will clearly demonstrate a commitment to sound and science-based decision-making that is backed up by scores of scientific and medical publications and will protect the health of every American.

The development of antimicrobial agents to treat life-threatening infections has been one of the most notable medical achievements of human medicine over the past century. However, there is growing concern among infectious diseases specialists that antimicrobial agents' effectiveness in treating infections is becoming compromised by increasing drug resistance. Infectious diseases physicians care for patients with serious infections, including HIV/AIDS, meningitis, heart valve infections, severe bone, joint or wound infections, and those with cancer or transplants who have life-threatening infections caused by unusual organisms. Antimicrobial resistance can complicate the treatment of patients suffering from these infections, sometimes leading to serious disability or death.

Many factors contribute to the development of antimicrobial-resistant pathogens, including the inappropriate use and abuse of antimicrobial drugs in human and animal medicine and in food animal production. The relationship between antimicrobial use in food animal production and the causation and development of resistant infections in humans is complex. However, there is a growing body of scientific evidence which demonstrates that antimicrobial use in food animals contributes to the spread of resistant bacteria to humans. This includes the direct acquisition of resistant pathogens through the food supply as well as the transfer of resistance genes to human bacterial populations. Despite uncertainties regarding the frequency and mechanisms of antibiotic resistance acquired from food animals, it is reasonable and prudent to conclude that the use of antimicrobial drugs in food animals poses a threat to human health.

Drug-resistant organisms are plaguing Americans, including otherwise healthy individuals, in healthcare settings and communities across the United States. IDSA is pleased that these concerns finally are being recognized and addressed by the Obama Administration and Congress to forestall epidemics of untreatable infections. IDSA stands ready to assist the Administration in any way that we can to address any outstanding scientific or public policy issues.

November 1, 2009