Every year, in the European Union, an estimated 25,000 patients die because of infections caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

We humans are often told to go easy on antibiotics, but did you know that animals should too?

1. **Antibiotics are used more often to treat animals than humans**

   On average, in the European Union, consumption of antibiotics is higher in food-producing animals than in humans. In Spain, Cyprus, Italy and Germany for instance, use of antibiotics for farm animals was twice as high as for humans in 2014.

2. **Giving antibiotics to healthy animals contributes to antibiotic resistance**

   Farm animals are routinely given antibiotics, even when they are healthy, to prevent disease in crowded or unhygienic conditions. Such misuse and overuse spurs antibiotic resistance. Bacteria found in European poultry and pigs commonly exhibit resistance to one or even several antibiotics. 70% of Campylobacter bacteria found on poultry meat are resistant to an antibiotic widely used to treat joint infections or diarrhoea.

3. **Antibiotics do not kill viruses**

   When you get an infection caused by a virus, such as a cold, flu, most sore throats, or bronchitis, antibiotics won’t help you. Antibiotics work against bacterial infections such as pneumonia, tuberculosis or a urinary tract infection. Only your doctor can tell you if you need antibiotics. The same goes for animals, which should only be given antibiotics upon veterinary prescription.

4. **It is bacteria—not humans or animals—that can resist antibiotics**

   Many wrongly assume that humans or animals develop a resistance to antibiotics when we talk of antibiotic resistance. But it is in fact disease-causing bacteria that become resistant to antibiotics. These resistant bugs may then infect humans and animals, and the infections they cause are harder to treat than those caused by non-resistant bacteria.

5. **How do bacteria become resistant to antibiotics?**

   Either naturally or because they have mutated, some bacteria have genes which make them withstand the effects of antibiotics. They are known as ‘superbugs’. While antibiotics kill most bacteria, superbugs survive and multiply - even more so when we use antibiotics incorrectly. These superbugs can transmit their resistance genes to other bacteria.

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Better farm hygiene, rules to prohibit the routine preventive use of antibiotics in farm animals and less stressful conditions for animals would help reduce the need for antibiotics.

So consumer organisations across Europe urge European leaders to act.

Follow #SuperbugTour on social media
www.beuc.eu/superbugtour

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1 EMA (2016). Sales of veterinary antimicrobial agents in 29 European countries in 2014 (pp. 66-67).