Unstoppable? Antibiotic resistance worldwide

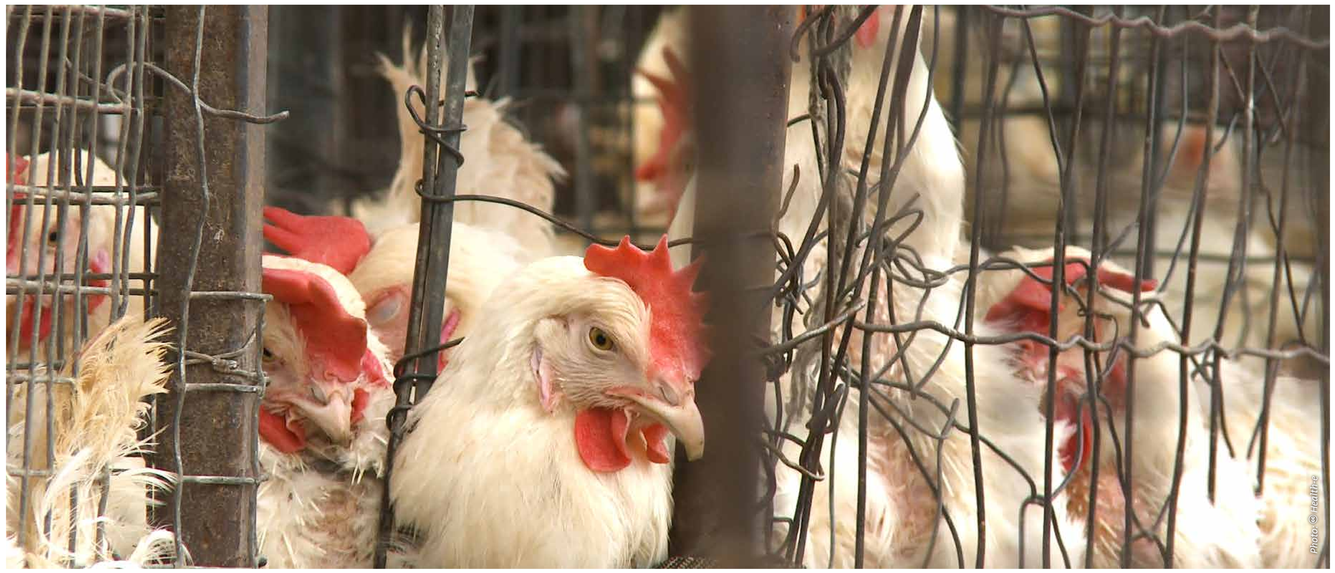
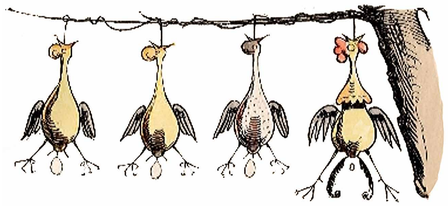


Photo: © Heal Fine

THIS STINKS TO HIGH HEAVEN

Animal-fattening facilities often emit an unpleasant smell. But you can't smell resistant germs.


From: Wilhelm Busch: Max and Moritz

"Animal factories need antibiotics to compensate for deficiencies in husbandry, breeding, management and hygiene."
Claudia Preuss-Ueberschär, vet

"When employees of livestock farms need intensive medical treatment, it's essential to ccarry out a rapid microbiological analysis to find out what germs they have. Otherwise you won't know which antibiotics will still work."
Gerhard Schwarzkopf-Steinhauser, microbiologist

HEALTHY ANIMALS?

In animal farms, pigs, cows or chickens often live in very confined spaces. That's why they get sick easily. They are often given antibiotics either to prevent disease or to promote growth. This favours the development of resistant bacteria. People who work with these animals are more likely to carry resistant bacteria than others.

Photo: © iStock

RESISTANT CHICKENS

In Germany, 82 milligrams of antibiotics are administered for every kilogramme of livestock. Chickens and turkeys get a particularly large amount – more than any other farm animal. Resistant germs are found in half of all poultry-meat samples sold in supermarkets. Poultry fattening is also widespread in poor countries, because it doesn't need much space. The animals are being fed with more and more antibiotics.

MEAT EXPORTS

Photo: © Jochen Kohler

In Germany, we produce much more meat than we eat. Germany is the world champion in pork exports in particular. Pork and also milk go mainly to China; frozen chicken parts are sold to Africa. Global trade contributes to the spread of resistant germs.

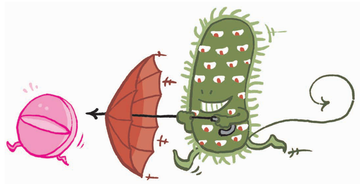
WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Buy meat that comes from animals kept in a species-appropriate way.
- Pay attention to hygiene when processing raw meat.
- Improve barn hygiene or your rearing concept.
- Avoid group treatments and oral administration of antibiotics.
- Avoid the use of colistin and other important reserve antibiotics.
- Advise farmers on what they can do to improve animal welfare and health.

"The big danger is that the bacteria are insensitive to antibiotics and that, in the case of severe diseases, there's nothing left to help the patient."
Doris Tormann, physician, Bielefeld

The development of resistance is a natural process. But it's accelerated by the wrong use of antibiotics. This is why it's important only to take them when it's necessary and sensible; the dosage shouldn't be too low, and the drugs should be taken for long enough. Antibiotics don't work against viral infections.

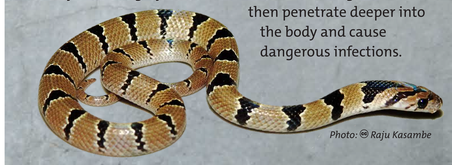
ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE



Antibiotic treatment kills bacteria or inhibits their growth. The more often bacteria come into contact with antibiotics, the more likely they are to develop resistance. This is because the tiny organisms are adaptable: they can change their genetic material and become insensitive to antibiotics.

INSIDIOUS DANGER

Resistant pathogens are not usually a problem for healthy people. Only if a person's immune system is weakened or they need surgery does it become critical. The germs can then penetrate deeper into the body and cause dangerous infections.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