

Press release: Sales of veterinary antibiotics at their lowest in 25 years

The [Veterinary Antimicrobial Resistance Sales and Surveillance \(VARSS\) report](#) shows that sales of antibiotics for use in food-producing animals dropped by 18% between 2016 and 2017 to reach a low of 37 mg/kg. Sales have also dropped by 40% between 2013 and 2017.

For the first time, the annual report presents data on the use of antibiotics in beef, trout and salmon in addition to usage in the poultry, pig, dairy, gamebird and egg-laying hen industries.

Antimicrobial Resistance occurs when the micro-organisms that cause infection survive exposure to a medicine that would normally kill them or stop their growth. It poses a major threat to modern medicine and is estimated to [cost £66 trillion in lost productivity to the global economy](#).

In 2013 the [UK government launched a strategy](#) to reduce the development and spread of antibiotic resistance in animals and humans. As part of this it provided advice to the food-producing animal industry and veterinary professions, encouraging more responsible use of antibiotics to protect medicines for the future.

Lord Gardiner, Minister for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity, said:

These results show an encouraging reduction of antibiotic use in beef, pigs, poultry and other food-producing animals. I hope that the results will set a further example for our food and farming sectors to tackle the threat of antimicrobial resistance. As we know, good farm management, biosecurity and animal husbandry systems are crucial to achieving this.

The UK's Chief Veterinary Officer, Christine Middlemiss, said:

A 40% drop in sales of antibiotics for use in food-producing animals between 2013 and 2017 is an excellent achievement. This is the result of year-on-year improvement in training, stewardship, stockmanship and disease control.

I praise the industry for their commitment to successfully deliver responsible use of antibiotics and reductions. We must continue to champion infection prevention and disease control to ensure high animal health standards and the optimised use of antimicrobials.

Further information:

- The UK Veterinary Antibiotic Resistance and Sales Surveillance (VARSS) report is published annually by Defra's Veterinary Medicines Directorate. The report provides the previous years' data on the quantity of authorised antibiotics for use in animals sold throughout the UK, and results from surveillance programmes looking at antibiotic resistance in animals.
- For the first time, antibiotic usage data from the beef cattle, salmon and trout industries are included in the report.
- For the first time the report presents harmonised outcome indicators on antibiotic resistance, as recommended by the European Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, [European Food Safety Authority and European Medicines Agency](#).
- The rates of resistance in healthy pigs at slaughter have remained relatively stable between 2015 and 2017 for most antibiotics tested; however, a decline has started to be observed in E. coli coinciding with a reduction in antibiotic use in pigs.
- As well as the overall reduction, the report shows a further drop in sales of the highest priority antibiotics that are critically important for human health. This includes a 94% reduction, compared to 2016, in the use of colistin, an antibiotic of last resort for use in people. Colistin use is now at 0.001 mg/kg, putting it considerably below the European Medicines Agency's target of using less than 1 mg/kg.