

Consultation launched to protect patients from silent pandemic of antimicrobial resistance

- Recent estimates suggest that AMR causes 1.27 million deaths globally each year and 7,600 deaths in the UK each year
- Views sought to inform next five-year plan to tackle what has been described as the next potential global pandemic

The increasing risk to patients of superbugs resistant to existing medicines will be the focus of a new consultation launched today [Wednesday 23].

The consultation will bring together the latest evidence and data from leading experts on antimicrobial resistance (AMR). It will help inform a new 5-year action national action plan to protect patients from deadly infections and will capture learnings from the Covid pandemic.

The consultation has been launched to coincide with World Antimicrobial Awareness Week 2022 – with this year's theme focussed on ensuring that affected sectors – such as food, plants, environment and health – collaborate together to fight AMR.

Resistance to antimicrobials is increasing, creating a new generation of 'superbugs' that cannot be treated with existing medicines. Without working antibiotics, routine surgery like caesarean sections or hip replacements will become too dangerous to perform, cancer chemotherapy will become too high risk and certain infections will require long and complex treatment or will no longer be treatable.

Prof Dame Sally Davies, UK Special Envoy on AMR said:

Antimicrobial Resistance may be the defining health challenge of this century.

I am proud of the UK's efforts on research and development, stewardship, surveillance and international engagement across all sectors.

I hope that our next National Action Plan will show that we can learn from the COVID-19 pandemic and collaborate to step up our actions.

A report published by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) this week showed there were more than 50,000 severe antibiotic-resistant infections in England

last year including bloodstream infections, skin infections, surgical site infections and skin and soft tissue infections.

The report also found the number of severe antibiotic resistant infections rose by 2.2.% in England compared to 2020, the equivalent of 148 infections per day. It warns that progress made on antibiotic use may not be sustained unless we continue to use antibiotics appropriately.

Dr Colin Brown, Deputy Director of Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare Associated Infections at the UK Health Security Agency, said:

Antimicrobial resistance is not a distant problem that we can ignore – infections caused by antibiotic resistant bacteria are killing thousands of people every year in this country and globally, as well as having a huge economic impact.

Our extensive data and surveillance programmes have identified the immense scale of the issue in this country. It has pinpointed areas for action, with targets to improve prescribing and limit antimicrobial-resistant and healthcare-associated infections over the last 5 years. We will continue to work with partners to respond to current threats and prepare for future challenges.

It is vital the future National Action Plan targets include measures to limit resistance, incentivise best practice in prescribing, and facilitate novel diagnostics and therapeutics.

The new 5 year national action plan will form the next stage of the government's existing 20-year AMR strategy, published in 2019. It set out an initial 5 year plan which will run until 2024. This consultation will seek views to ensure that the next five year plan – continuing up until 2029 – is informed by the most up to date evidence.

Since the publication of the 2019 strategy, Government has made significant progress in tackling AMR, for example reducing the use of antibiotics in food producing animals, piloting novel and innovative ways of evaluating and paying for antibiotics on the NHS through a subscription model – a world first, and securing commitments to tackle AMR on several ministerial tracks during the UK's G7 presidency.

Input from technical experts (including on human health, animal and plant health, food, and AMR in the environment) is encouraged as part of the consultation, to help shape the UK's 2024-2029 national action plan.

It is also aiming to attract context from how we helped to tackle the Covid pandemic, as the tools we use will be similar – such as with vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics and public behaviours.

Top tips for keeping antibiotics working longer for the public:

- Always take antibiotics as prescribed.

- The outbreak of COVID-19 has highlighted the action we can all be taking to prevent infection, such as prioritising hygiene and practising social distancing where appropriate. [Wash your hands](#) regularly and prevent the spread of infections.
- Taking antibiotics when you do not need them means they are less likely to work in the future. Not all infections need antibiotics and many mild bacterial infections get better on their own. People can learn how to be an [Antibiotic Guardian](#) by making a pledge to keep antibiotics working.
- Make sure you are up to date with your vaccines and inoculations: preventing infection means there is less likelihood of complications from secondary bacterial infections that require antibiotics.