

World Health Organization Focuses on Antibiotic Use in Food Animals

The World Health Organization held a meeting of 70 participants from both human and animal health fields October 17, 1997 in Berlin Germany. The purpose was to review currently available knowledge on the hazards of the use of antibiotics in food animals. The resultant press release is entitled "Antibiotic Use in Food-Producing Animals Must be Curtailed to Prevent Increased Resistance in Humans." This is very strong language from a very prestigious organization.

The news release states "Public health consequences from the excessive use of antimicrobials in livestock production include the emergence of resistant microbes in livestock production which can then be transferred to humans through the food chain. Resistant strains of four bacteria that cause disease in humans have been transmitted from animals to humans and shown to have consequences for human health. They are Salmonella, Campylobacter, Enterococci and E. coli. "

Reports at the meeting presented evidence that antibiotic use in food-producing animals results in resistant salmonella infections in humans. The antibiotics of greatest concern are the fluoroquinolones. A dramatic rise in the prevalence of fluoroquinolone-resistant Campylobacter infections in poultry and humans in many countries was cited. Meeting participants were concerned about the emergence of Salmonella with reduced susceptibility to fluoroquinolones. A meeting to address the potential medical problems related to the use of fluoroquinolones in food animals is planned for February 1998 in Washington, DC.

The participants agreed that there was a greater need for monitoring the presence or emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria in livestock and food of animal origin. They suggested quantitative data be collected, using standardized methods, from all points along the food chain.

Position statements issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) of Geneva Switzerland are perceived as the consensus of worldwide health professionals. This internationally based organization affiliated with the United Nations states its mission as the "attainment by all peoples of the highest level of health. All WHO press releases, fact sheets and features can be obtained on the WHO home page <http://www.who.ch/>.

The issues of antibiotic use in food producing animals, and the impact of this use on human health and human pathogen antibiotic resistance are critically important and sure to produce controversial discussion in the months and years to come. We will try to keep you apprised of new developments in this area. Meanwhile you should be aware that results of this controversy are likely to affect you directly. There is no time like the present to review your use of antibiotics and other disease management strategies with your veterinarian.