

Why the European Medicines Agency indicates a ban on veterinary use of colistin would impact animal welfare

Specific important antimicrobials, such as colistin, are needed for animal health in order to treat disease and protect animal welfare. Sales of colistin for veterinary use are decreasing and prevalence of resistance in animals remains low. At the same time, use of colistin in hospitals is showing a dramatic increase, which is followed by similar trends in resistance.

The transfer of resistance genes to humans via the food chain is seen as a potential cause for this increase in resistance, but a lack of data makes it impossible to estimate the extent of resistance transfer from animals.

Current scientific evidence does not recommend a ban on colistin use in animal health

There are several reasons:

- The main use of colistin is for **colibacillosis, a devastating infectious bacterial disease**, in young animals, pigs, lambs, poultry.
- Use of colistin is **restricted** to the treatment of colibacillosis **after susceptibility testing** by the vet to determine which antimicrobial is needed, with a **limited treatment period** of 7 days.
- Colistin can only be used if no other alternatives are available. Alternatives are **very limited and depend on what is the best course of treatment**. Some alternatives are worse than colistin, i.e. less effective or with higher potential for side effects.

A few facts on use today in the EU:

- Programmes exist in many Member States to **reduce polymyxin use in animals. This includes colistin.**
- Efforts to reduce use have been **successful**, as the ESVAC report records a **76.5% decrease in sales** of polymyxins (mainly colistin) since 2011.*
- Mandatory EU surveillance shows that the **prevalence of resistance of colistin resistance in animals remains low** (with variability between Member States and species).
- **Further changes** are being implemented in animal husbandry to **prevent colibacillosis and reduce the need to use colistin for animal treatment.**

Further important considerations:

- The list of antimicrobials reserved for humans goes hand-in-hand with new EU rules on veterinary medicines which further restricts use in order to ensure a reduced and more responsible use of antimicrobials.
- Member States wishing to further restrict/prohibit the use of certain antimicrobials in line with national prudent use policy may do so, in line with provisions of the new regulation.



*Source Sales of veterinary antimicrobial agents in 31 European countries in 2019 and 2020 (europa.eu)