



Media Release

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Resistance to antibiotics is a looming health crisis, says College of Public Health Medicine

New Zealanders face a looming health crisis, because some relatively common infections are developing resistance to the medicines that are usually used to treat them.

The NZ College of Public Health Medicine (NZCPHM) is warning that antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a major public health issue that could cause 10 million deaths globally each year by 2050 if allowed to continue unchecked¹.

“AMR is when microorganisms including bacteria, fungi, viruses and parasites no longer respond to treatment by antimicrobial medicines, such as antibiotics, antifungals, antivirals and antimalarials,” College president, Dr Caroline McElnay said.

“This means standard treatments for a variety of relatively common infections are becoming ineffective. The medicines no longer work, infections persist and people remain sick, increasing the risk of dying and spread to others.

“AMR has been described as a leading global health issue that “threatens the very core of modern medicine.”¹

Dr McElnay says it is critical that New Zealand develops a strategy to ensure the effective stewardship of these medicines. “This is a global issue in which New Zealand absolutely has to play its part. We need to get widespread commitment and leadership from medical, veterinary and agricultural sectors in New Zealand, working together.

“New Zealand has committed internationally to have this plan in place by May 2017, and it is important that we meet this goal.

“Equally important is the commitment by the government to actually implement the plan and make sure it is sufficiently monitored and funded.”

AMR is such a critical threat to international health that global leaders are discussing appropriate counter measures at the United Nations General Assembly in New York on September 21, 2016.

This is only the fourth time in the UN’s history that a health topic has been discussed at the General Assembly (HIV, non-communicable diseases, and Ebola were the others).

The College calls for a national plan that should incorporate:

- preventing infections;
- improving antimicrobial prescribing and stewardship, in both community and healthcare settings;
- public education;
- national, DHB-level monitoring and surveillance activities;

¹ New Zealand College of Public Health Medicine. NZCPHM Policy Statement on Antimicrobial stewardship and infection control: limiting the burden of antimicrobial resistance. Wellington: NZCPHM, 2016.

http://www.nzcpm.org.nz/media/97734/2016_08_24_nzcpm_antimicrobial_resistance_policy_statement.pdf

- suitable regulation of agricultural and veterinary use (and improving stewardship) of antimicrobials;
- a national strategy that links with international efforts; and
- new research to identify the most effective methods to revive and sustain the effectiveness of existing antimicrobial agents.

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The NZ College of Public Health Medicine released in August its statement on antimicrobial resistance/stewardship and infection control, 'Limiting the burden of antimicrobial resistance'.

The College statement is available at

http://www.nzcphm.org.nz/media/97734/2016_08_24_nzcphm_antimicrobial_resistance_policy_statement.pdf.