

Expert warning: Resistance to antibiotics to be apocalyptic

January 25 2013, by Lin Edwards



Staphylococcus aureus - Antibiotics Test plate. Credit: CDC

(Medical Xpress)—The chief medical officer for Britain's Department of Health has issued a warning that resistance to bacteria is a more

urgent threat to humanity than global warming, with bacteria becoming resistant to current antibiotics at an alarming rate, and there are almost no new antibiotics in the pipeline.

Professor Dame Sally Davies spoke to British members of parliament on a science and technology committee and told them the increasing resistance of bacteria could soon make even a routine operation a deadly option because of the possibility of an infection that would have no effective treatment. She said that the real "apocalyptic scenario" was that within a couple of decades people will die from infections because we will have "run out of antibiotics" and there are no wonder drugs in the pipeline. She added that it is a serious global problem and antibiotics are not being used effectively.

The development of antibiotics in the 1940s was one of the greatest advances in medicine, but they are becoming increasingly ineffective as bacteria become resistant to them. Prof. Davies said there is only one effective antibiotic left for [gonorrhea](#) and 80% of cases are resistant to tetracycline. Tuberculosis is becoming increasingly resistant and there are around 150,000 deaths globally from multi-antibiotic [resistant tuberculosis](#) each year. Staphylococcal and [urinary tract infections](#) are now resistant to penicillin, and MRSA (methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus) is increasingly prevalent, especially in [health care facilities](#).

Prof. Davies said there is "a broken market model" for the development of new antibiotics, which means there could be no new antibiotics in the future. The pharmaceutical industry is concentrating its efforts on more profitable treatments such as drugs for [chronic diseases](#), which has led to a reduction in research aiming to find or develop [new antibiotics](#).

The [World Health Organization](#) has also warned of a coming post-antibiotic era in which common ailments cured by antibiotics will once

again be fatal. Director-General Margaret Chan said a post-antibiotic era would mean even a common scratch or a strep throat could again lead to uncurable infections and death.

In March, Prof. Davies will be releasing her annual report, which will include strategies to solve this global problem. She said it was a serious issue that needs to be tackled urgently, and will be asking the Cabinet Office to add it to the national risk register. She also urged doctors to be more cautious about how they prescribe antibiotics and patients to be more responsible in taking them (by taking the entire course when antibiotics are prescribed).

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