

# US 'upgrades' plan against antibiotic resistance

September 18 2014

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US President Barack Obama on Thursday issued an executive order to ramp up the national response to the problem of antibiotic resistance and infections that cannot be treated.

The White House called for a task force that combines the government's health, defense and agriculture departments to deliver a five-year plan to the president by February 2015.

The administration was also to release a blueprint for moving forward, described as a "national strategy" for fighting resistant bacteria.

The strategy will "strengthen national surveillance capabilities and expand the arsenal of diagnostics, antibiotics and other countermeasures available to combat resistant bacteria," said a White House statement.

"This may sound bureaucratic. It is anything but," Eric Lander, co-chair of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, told reporters.

The order also called for a presidential advisory council of non-governmental experts to meet on ways to advance research and surveillance.

It directed the Food and Drug Administration "to continue taking steps to eliminate agricultural use of medically important antibiotics for growth-promotion purposes."

In addition, the government announced a \$20 million prize for the development of a rapid diagnostic test for health care providers to use to identify highly resistant bacterial infection.

"This represents a major elevation of the issue, a major upgrading of the administration's efforts to help address it," said John Holdren, director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy.

Antibiotic-resistant infections are associated with 23,000 deaths and two million illnesses in the United States each year, said the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The economic costs annually are as high as \$20 billion in excess direct health care costs and \$35 billion in lost productivity from hospitalizations and sick days, the administration said.

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Citation: US 'upgrades' plan against antibiotic resistance (2014, September 18) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-09-white-house-antibiotic-resistance.html>

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