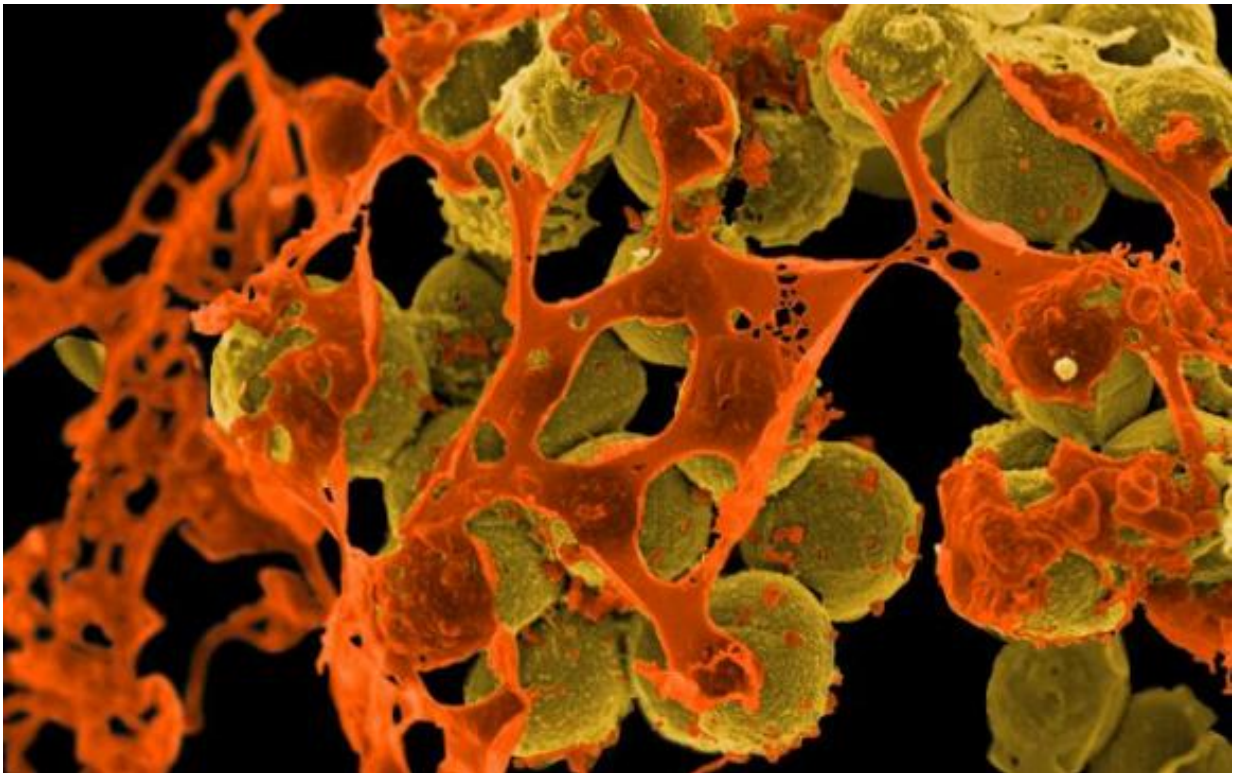


World failing in fight against antibiotic resistance: WHO

April 29 2015



Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. Credit: NIH/NIAID

The world is doing far too little to combat the misuse of antibiotics which is fuelling drug resistance and allowing long-treatable diseases to become killers, the World Health Organization said Wednesday.

In its first ever analysis of how countries are responding to the problem of antimicrobial resistance—when bugs become immune to existing drugs—the UN health agency revealed "major gaps" in all six regions of the world.

"This is the single greatest challenge in infectious diseases today," Keiji Fukuda, WHO's assistant director general for health security, said in a statement.

"All types of microbes, including many viruses and parasites, are becoming resistant to medicines," he warned, voicing particular concern over "bacteria that are progressively less treatable by available antibiotics."

"This is happening in all parts of the world, so all countries must do their part to tackle this global threat," he said.

A year ago, WHO issued a hard-hitting study on the phenomenon, cautioning that without significant action the world would be headed for "a post-antibiotic era".

In such an era, "common infections and minor injuries that have been treatable for decades, may once again kill", Charles Penn, WHO coordinator on antimicrobial resistance, told reporters.

"We will lose the ability to treat a range of serious conditions such as blood stream infections, pneumonia, tuberculosis, malaria and HIV, and the benefits of advanced medical treatment, such as cancer chemotherapy and major surgery will also become much riskier and may well be lost," he warned.

The UN agency has since conducted a survey of 133 countries asking governments to assess their response to resistance to antimicrobial

medicines.

Sixty WHO member states did not take part in the survey, including the United States and China.

Situation 'alarming'

Wednesday's report—which breaks down the data on a regional basis and does not provide country-specific information—shows the global response is dangerously lacking.

Only a quarter of countries that answered the survey had comprehensive national plans in place to fight resistance to antibiotics and other antimicrobial medicines, it said.

"This is too few," Penn said.

One major concern is that sales of such drugs without prescription remain widespread around the world.

Counterfeit and low-quality drugs have also been reported in many regions, causing headaches since such medicines often do not contain the right amount of the active ingredient, "resulting in sub-optimal dosing", the report said.

This was of particular concern in the African region, where it was a "general problem", the report found, with only eight of the 47 WHO member states in Africa responding to the survey.

Many countries also lack standard treatment guidelines, raising the possibility of overuse of the drugs, it warned.

"Both overuse and misuse of antimicrobial medicines accelerate the

emergence of resistant microorganisms."

Monitoring of the use of such drugs was also "infrequent" in most regions, although European countries had made progress in this area, WHO said.

The lack of oversight is especially worrying since public awareness about the dangers of misusing antibiotics remains low in all regions.

"This situation is alarming," the report said, adding that many people continue to believe antibiotics can be used to fight viral infections, which is not the case.

Even in Europe, where public information campaigns are common, half the population believes viruses can be fought with antibiotics, it found.

WHO has drafted a Global Action Plan for addressing antimicrobial resistance and plans to ask all member states to approve it at its annual meeting in Geneva next month.

By doing so, countries will agree to draw up their own national plans within two years.

"The world needs to do much more," Penn said.

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