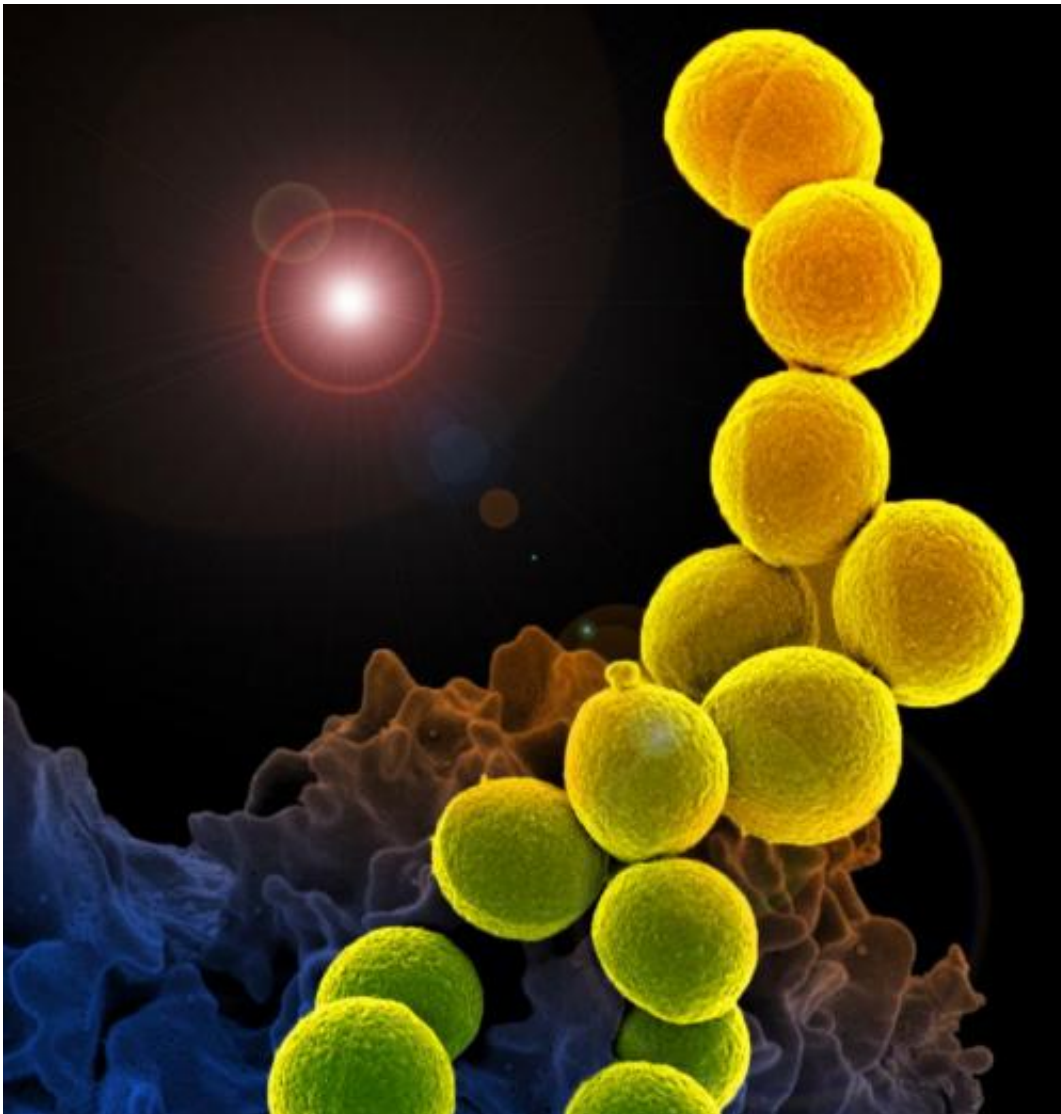


Deep changes urged to avoid mass deaths from superbugs

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In this electron micrograph, a white blood cell eats an antibiotic resistant bacteria called methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or MRSA. Credit: National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

Ten million people could die by 2050 unless sweeping global changes are agreed to tackle increasing resistance to antibiotics, which can turn common ailments into killers, a report warned Thursday.

Commissioned by the British government, the Review on Antimicrobial Resistance set out steps to fight the emergence of "superbugs" as infections become immune to existing drugs, allowing minor injuries and common infections to become deadly.

"It needs to be seen as the economic and security threat that it is, and be at the forefront of the minds of heads of state," wrote Jim O'Neill, the economist who led the review.

The overuse of antibiotics should be reduced by cutting the vast quantities of medicines given to farm animals, improving diagnoses to stop unnecessary prescriptions, and a global public awareness campaign, the paper urged.

At the same time, researchers should be encouraged to develop [new antibiotics](#) through a global fund for research and rewards for those who manage to develop new drugs.

The cost of the measures was estimated to be \$40 billion (35.6 billion euros) over ten years—far less than the cost if the growing problem is not addressed.

"There is no excuse for inaction given what we know about the impact of rising [drug resistance](#)," the paper said.

Governments will face the cost "sooner or later", it added.

"They can either do so proactively by taking action now and pay less for better outcomes, or remain unprepared and end up spending much more taxpayer money on far worse outcomes further down the line."

The paper argued that the response could be funded through countries' health budgets or through taxes on pharmaceutical companies that do not invest on antibiotic research.

O'Neill, an economist known for coining the term "BRIC" to describe large emerging countries and who was asked by the British government to chair the review, noted that one million people had died of [antimicrobial resistance](#) since the review started in mid-2014.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has already warned antimicrobial resistance may result in "a return to the pre-antibiotic era," when millions of people died in pandemics before drugs were discovered that could treat them.

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