

Experts recommend using COVID-19 resources to tackle the 'silent pandemic' of antimicrobial resistance

November 25 2022



Gerry Wright, the executive director of McMaster University's Global Nexus for Pandemics and Biological Threats, is a globally renowned expert in antimicrobial resistance. Wright is part of a group of experts calling for the Canadian government to use COVID-19 resources to address the “silent pandemic” of superbugs. Credit: McMaster University

Infections that can't be treated with antibiotics are a global health crisis and experts are calling for the Canadian government to use COVID-19 resources to address the "silent pandemic" of superbugs.

Canada has an opportunity to become a global leader in the fight against [antimicrobial resistance](#) (AMR)—a growing health crisis that recently killed more people in a single year than HIV/AIDS and [breast cancer](#), according to a recent article published in *The Lancet Regional Health—Americas*.

"We can learn a lot from our collective experience, painfully acquired during the COVID-19 pandemic, about how we can meet the antibiotic resistance crisis," said Gerry Wright, an author on the paper and executive director of McMaster University's Global Nexus for Pandemics and Biological Threats.

Antimicrobials are medicines like antibiotics and antifungals. Their overuse is one of the main drivers of superbugs—drug-resistant pathogens—that can no longer be treated with the medicines designed to treat them.

Wright, one of the world's most highly cited researchers, is a globally renowned expert in AMR, a priority research area at the Global Nexus.

"Antibiotics are unique medicines," explained Wright. "They don't work forever because infectious microbes learn to adapt. Consequently, we must always be working on creative ways to counter infections."

The lead author of the article, Deborah Somanader of the Antimicrobial Stewardship Program at the Sinai Health-University Health Network in Toronto, along with experts from across Canada, urged the federal government to support the development of new rapid tests, vaccines and antibiotics that target resistant bacteria.

Rapid tests would allow doctors to diagnose infections more quickly and accurately. Currently, it can take anywhere from hours to days to get test results, which leads to the overuse of antibiotics and the rise of AMR.

The [federal government](#) has pledged \$3.4 billion to COVID-19 vaccines and a new vaccine manufacturing facility is in development. These resources should also be used to develop new vaccines that target resistant bacteria, the paper's authors state. Also, compared to antibiotics, vaccines can more accurately target infections caused by resistant bacteria.

The authors argue that Canada needs better surveillance and stewardship of [antibiotics](#) in long-term care homes and Indigenous communities along with a more comprehensive system that tracks resistant bacteria.

"An effective AMR response requires a One Health approach that considers the interrelationships between humans, animals and the environment, as well as coordinated action across provinces and territories, jurisdictions and sectors that are implicated in AMR mitigation. A multi-pronged approach is required, similar to the plan of action for COVID-19 mitigation and recovery put forward in 2021."

More information: Deborah S. Somanader et al, Canada has an opportunity to address antimicrobial resistance through COVID-19 recovery spending, *The Lancet Regional Health—Americas* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.lana.2022.100393](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lana.2022.100393)

Provided by McMaster University

Citation: Experts recommend using COVID-19 resources to tackle the 'silent pandemic' of antimicrobial resistance (2022, November 25) retrieved 25 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-11-experts-covid-resources-tackle-silent.html>

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