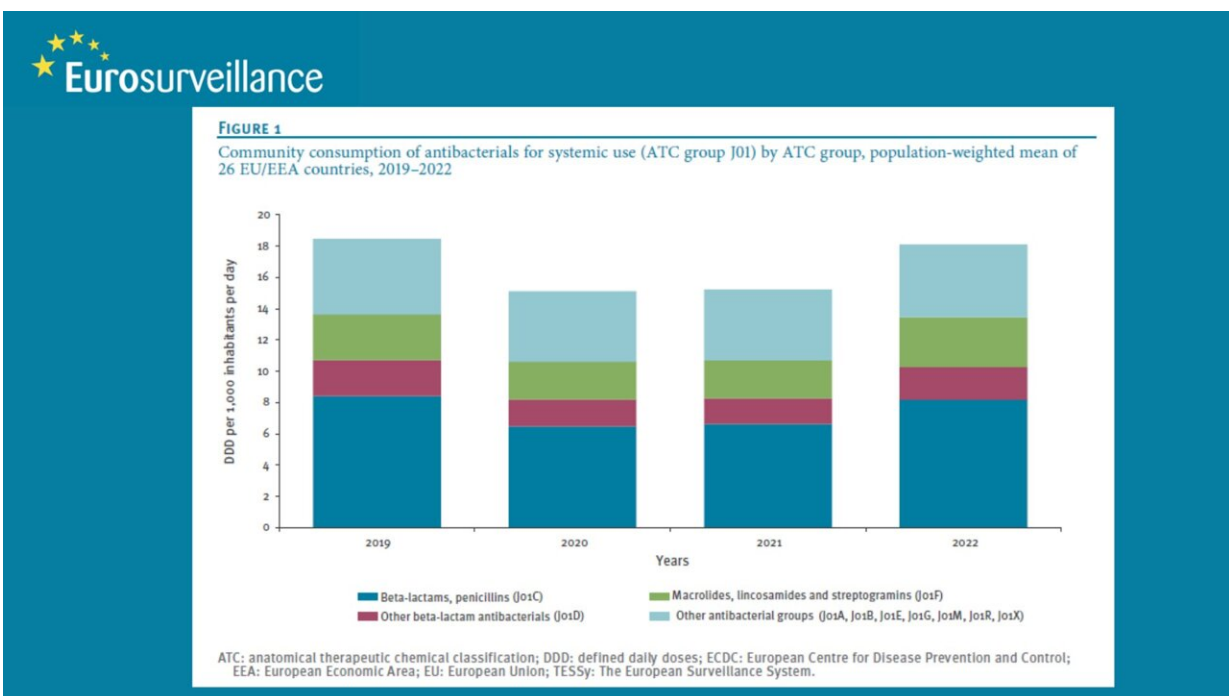


Consumption of antibiotics in the community back to pre-pandemic levels in the European Union and European Economic Area

November 17 2023



The authors observed a high variability in the EU/EEA population-weighted mean community antibiotic consumption between 2019 and 2022. Credit: *Eurosurveillance*

This year's European Antibiotic Awareness Day (EAAD) focuses on the targets outlined in the 2023 [Council Recommendation](#) to step up efforts

in the European Union (EU) against antimicrobial resistance in a One Health approach. Those recommendations formulate the 2023 goal to reduce total antibiotic consumption (community and hospital sectors combined) by 20%, using consumption data from 2019 as a baseline.

Consumption of antibiotics in the community accounts for around 90% of the total use. This means, that a substantial and consistent decline in the use of antibiotics in this sector will be key on the way towards reaching the set goals for 2030 which aim at preventing and reducing antimicrobial resistance overall.

During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, data from the European Union (EU)/European Economic Area (EEA) showed an unprecedented 18.5% decrease in community [consumption](#) of antibiotics in 2020 compared with the 2019 baseline.

This drop has been related to the use of non-pharmaceutical interventions (e.g. physical distancing or wearing of face masks) which reduced overall spread of pathogens, and to the fact that prescriptions of antibiotics were affected by the disrupted access to health care services during the first year of the pandemic.

Unusual fluctuation between 2019 and 2022

In their rapid communication published in *Eurosurveillance* on the occasion of EAAD and World AMR Awareness Week, Ventura-Gabarró et al. present the most recent data reported to the European Surveillance of Antimicrobial Consumption Network. They show that the observed decrease from 2020 did not last.

Instead, along with the gradual lifting of interventions across the EU/EEA, mean community consumption went up again and increased by 18.8% between 2021 and 2022 with no significant difference from the

pre-pandemic level in 2019. This rebound in consumption of antibacterials for systemic use in the community sector moved antibiotic consumption rates back towards the 2019 baseline value.

The data presented by Ventura-Gabarró et al. show different patterns of antibiotic consumption across the EU/EEA countries. In 13 of 27 countries, community antibiotic consumption was higher in 2022 than in 2019, with an average increase of 8.4% among these 13 countries (range: 0.6–26.9).

From 2020 to 2021, the EU/EEA overall, as in 15 [individual countries](#) (Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden), observed no or just a marginal (less than $\pm 3\%$) change in antibiotic consumption in the community. Between 2021 and 2022 pre-pandemic levels of 2019 were reached again with an average increase of 20.5%.

The authors highlight that "although the resurgence of both viral and bacterial respiratory tract infections during the latter part of our study period might partly explain this rebound in antibiotic consumption, the increase could also reflect a missed opportunity to strengthen and reinforce prudent antibiotic use."

They conclude that "the COVID-19-pandemic had a substantial impact on community antibiotic consumption in the EU/EEA between 2020 and 2022. Countries exhibited different patterns of antibiotic consumption, underlining the importance of understanding each country in its own context. Further examination into local prescribing and consumption behaviors for specific antibiotic groups can inform effective stewardship interventions and bring the EU/EEA closer to its antibiotic consumption targets for 2030."

The paper is [published](#) in the journal *Eurosurveillance*.

More information: Cèlia Ventura-Gabarró et al, Rebound in community antibiotic consumption after the observed decrease during the COVID-19 pandemic, EU/EEA, 2022, *Eurosurveillance* (2023).

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