

## **Defra issues response to TV programme on antibiotics use on animals**

The BBC broadcast its 'Real Story' investigation into antibiotic resistance in the food chain last night (15 August). The concerns raised in the programme about the potential risk to human health from the use of antibiotics in food animal production have been addressed and put into context by the Health Protection Authority's press statement today – see [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk).

Defra has also issued a statement – see below:

### **Defra response to BBC 1's Real Story programme on the use of antibiotics in animals on 15 August 2005**

1. Defra has been advising the BBC on their 'Real Story' investigation into antibiotic resistance in the food chain for many months. We have answered two sets of questions and provided informal background briefing at a two-hour meeting.
2. The Government takes the issue of antimicrobial resistance very seriously and Defra has been working closely for many years with the Department of Health, the Health Protection Agency and the Food Standards Agency. All have representatives on Defra's Antimicrobial Resistance Co-ordination Group. The Health Protection Agency has strong links with Defra's Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) on antimicrobial resistance monitoring. These two agencies collaborate and share data to monitor trends in antimicrobial susceptibility in humans and animals.
3. Defra funds the VLA to conduct an ongoing programme of surveillance for antimicrobial resistance in England and Wales, in a full range of clinical isolates from farmed animals including chickens. This work is reported [on the animal health section of this site](#) (pdf, 308 KB). In addition a 'rolling programme' of statistically designed abattoir surveys has been initiated to look not only at levels of antimicrobial resistance, but also at the prevalence of important Zoonotic infections. So far, these studies have addressed pigs, cattle and sheep. Defra is implementing the requirements of the new EU Zoonoses Regulation and these include a series of National surveys for salmonella in poultry. The survey for laying flocks is underway and for broilers has been agreed and will start in October. These will be followed by surveys covering turkeys and pigs. Antimicrobial resistance testing will be carried out on the salmonella isolates recovered during these surveys. There is currently no statutory requirement for a campylobacter survey of broilers but Defra is in the process of commissioning a survey as part of a research project.

4. The Government recognises that veterinary medicines, including antimicrobials, are required to ensure healthy food animals in the UK, but believes that their use should not be a substitute for good farm management and animal husbandry systems.

5. It is widely agreed that resistant strains of bacteria found in animals have largely resulted from the general use of antimicrobial treatments in veterinary medicine and agriculture and that resistant strains of bacteria found in humans have resulted from the use of antimicrobial treatments in human medicine. However, some antimicrobial resistance in certain types of bacteria in humans results from resistance in bacteria in animals. The Government therefore believes that antimicrobials should be used responsibly in food animal production and has issued guidelines for their responsible use.

6. Reports of illegal sales and administration of prescription only medicines (POMs) in the UK are treated as serious offences, and all such cases are pursued. As a result, in the last two years Defra secured prosecutions against 29 farmers and dealers who have illegally imported, marketed or administered such medicines. These farmers paid a total of £91,000 in fines and costs. More prosecutions are pending. Whilst we believe that such action has highlighted the problem and acted as a deterrent, we are conscious that the problem continues.

7. The concerns raised in the programme about the potential risk to human health from the use of antibiotics in food animal production have been addressed and put into context by the HPA's press statement of 16 August 2005 (see [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk)).

8. The United Kingdom is one of the few countries in the world that collect, collate and publish information on sales of veterinary antimicrobials for use, and antimicrobial resistance, in animals (see [www.vmd.gov.uk](http://www.vmd.gov.uk)).