



ANIMAL JUSTICE PROJECT
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FACTSHEET

ANIMAL FARMING, PANDEMICS & ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE

Pandemics such as coronavirus continue to kill millions of people worldwide¹.

Through human contact with animals (for example when people eat their flesh, or secretions such as milk or eggs), pandemic viruses transfer to the human 'host', often mutating along the way. Covid-19 arose in animals, jumped the species barrier to humans, and then spread human-to-human. Germs that spread between animals and people are called 'zoonotic' and include Avian influenza, toxoplasmosis, Ebola and salmonellosis.

Whilst researchers believe that the novel coronavirus originated in wild bats, the principal driver of zoonotic diseases is industrial animal agriculture. In 2019, experts reported that intensive farming provides the ideal conditions for bacteria and viruses to spread between animals and humans, increasing the risk of epidemics^{2,3}. In order to meet the unsustainable global demand for cheap, readily-available meat and other animal 'products', we cram animals into over-crowded, filthy sheds. 90 percent of farmed animals globally are living on intensive farms⁴. 'Free-range' is no better – thousands of animals housed in sheds, never seeing the outside, as countless undercover investigations have shown. Schemes like 'Red Tractor' in the UK set out to appease the public about 'animal welfare' and hygiene, but the reality is very different.

ANIMAL FARMING & PANDEMICS

It isn't just 'wet markets' – where live animals are sold amongst the dead – that cause pandemics. It is very much also modern-day animal farms. Here, the same conditions that facilitate the emergence of infectious diseases also inflict horrific harm on animals. **The coronavirus and other pandemics are a result of our gross maltreatment of animals.**

When we overcrowd stressed animals by the thousands in cramped sheds – touching each other and forcing them to lie or stand on filthy floors – disease becomes rife. Animal farming systems are giant petri dishes for bacteria. Additionally, farmed animals are bred specifically for traits like large chicken breasts and so they are almost identical, genetically. This means viruses spread easily from animal to animal. As they rip through the sheds, viruses can grow even more virulent. These pathogens then jump to humans and that's when you get human pandemics. In 2019, a study revealed *Campylobacter* can be found in the faeces of chickens, pigs, cattle and wild animals – and is estimated to be present in the excrement of 20 percent of cattle globally^{2,3}.





An example of a pandemic originating at animal farms is the novel Swine flu, which arose in pig farms and jumped to humans, quickly becoming a global pandemic that killed hundreds of thousands of people. In fact, some of the worst diseases in human history – Covid-19, MERS, Swine flu, SARS, Avian flu, BSE, HIV and Spanish flu – ALL came from animal farming. And now, because we're increasingly sending animals on journeys across international borders, the diseases spread even more. The reality is, it is not 'if', it's 'when' there is going to be another flu virus like Swine flu.

ANIMAL FARMING & ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE

The other serious risk animal farming brings has to do with highly drug-resistant forms of bacterial pathogens – that is, antibiotic resistance. As a direct result of filthy and overcrowded sheds, farmers feed animals antibiotics, which keep them alive until they are sent for slaughter. And it is a lot of antibiotics. Most farmed animals get antibiotics every single day of their lives. Not just to prevent disease, but to fatten them up (promoting fast and unnatural growth). **This is a global problem – up to 80 percent of antibiotics around the world⁵ are fed to farmed animals.**

The World Health Organization (WHO) has produced guidelines recommending that farmers and the food industry **STOP using antibiotics routinely⁶** due to antibiotic resistance. It is one of the biggest threats to global health⁷, with experts predicting that it will kill 10 million people each year by 2050. Currently around 700,000 people around the world die due to antibiotic resistance each year^{8,9} and a major 2019 report highlighted that, in the United States, one person dies



every 15 minutes from it⁹. Common diseases, including respiratory, STDs and urinary tract infections, are becoming untreatable. When bacteria adapt, antibiotics become less and less effective.

Without antibiotics to fight off infection, diseases that we currently regard as not severe, can become deadly. Routine hospital procedures, such as knee replacements, transplants and chemotherapy, as well as dental work, can become life-threatening and dangerous. This has resulted in an increasingly threatening situation and impaired human antibiotic resistance dwarfs the number of deaths related to Covid-19.

Animal farming not only causes immense pain, suffering, fear and death – it is also causing one of the biggest threats to mankind.

“We have reached a critical point and must act now on a global scale to slow down antimicrobial resistance.”

Dame Sally Claire Davies, GCB, DBE, FRS, FMedSci,
UK Special Envoy on Antimicrobial Resistance

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

For years, expert bodies like the WHO¹⁰ and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention¹¹ have been warning that most emerging infectious diseases come from animals. Now that we've come face to face with the facts – that animal farming causes zoonotic disease and it contributes significantly to antibiotic resistance – the question is, what can we do to prevent a future pandemic? For this to become a reality, we must adopt a plant-based diet as a matter of urgency. This global, profit-driven, meat-centered food system is making us sick, and it is causing immeasurable pain and suffering to billions of animals worldwide. In 2016, the UN Environment Programme warned that the “livestock revolution”¹² was a zoonotic disaster waiting to happen. It's time to change the revolution to a plant-based food one.

Find out more about the costs behind pandemics:
animaljusticeproject.com/costofapandemic

RESOURCES

Films: 'What the Health' & 'Gamechangers' (Netflix)
Book: 'How Not to Die' by Dr Michael Greger
Online support: challenge22.com & veganuary.com

- 1 worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries
- 2 pnas.org/content/early/2020/04/28/1917168117
- 3 dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-8285661/Intensive-farming-increases-risk-epidemics-study-shows.html
- 4 sentscienceinstitute.org/global-animal-farming-estimates
- 5 who.int/news-room/detail/07-11-2017-stop-using-antibiotics-in-healthy-animals-to-prevent-the-spread-of-antibiotic-resistance
- 6 who.int/foodsafety/publications/cia_guidelines
- 7 who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/antibiotic-resistance
- 8 amr-review.org
- 9 cdc.gov/drugresistance/pdf/threats-report/2019-ar-threats-report-508.pdf
- 10 who.int/foodsafety/areas_work/zoonose
- 11 cdc.gov/onehealth/basics/zoonotic-diseases.html
- 12 environmentlive.unep.org/media/docs/assessments/UNEP_Frontiers_2016_report_emerging_issues_of_environmental_concern.pdf