

The Address of the Director-General of Health
At the World Antibiotic Awareness Week 2022 Webinar
18TH November 2022

I would like to welcome all attendees to the opening of the World Antibiotic Awareness Week, South Africa, and to thank all the presenters for their time and expertise that they will be sharing with us this week.

World Antibiotic Awareness week is observed every year from the 18th to the 24th of November with the aim to highlight the importance of antibiotics, a precious resource, and the importance of antimicrobial resistance (or AMR).

AMR is a threat to humans, animals, plants, and the environment. It affects everyone, which is why this year's theme is calling for collaboration across sectors to preserve the efficacy of antibiotics. Fighting AMR is a truly global endeavour and must be addressed through a One Health approach. The One-Health approach is a holistic approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals, ecosystems, and the wider environment. It mobilises multiple sectors, disciplines, and communities to work together to foster well-being and tackle threats to health and ecosystems.

To curb AMR effectively, all sectors must join forces and encourage the prudent use of antimicrobials, as well as preventive measures. Strengthening infection prevention and control in health care facilities, farms, and food industry premises, ensuring access to vaccines, clean water, sanitation, and hygiene, implementing best practices in food and agriculture production, and guaranteeing the sound management of waste and wastewater from relevant industries are critical to reducing the need for antimicrobials and minimizing the emergence and transmission of AMR.

According to The World Health Organization, South Africa ranks among the highest burden for drug resistant TB globally. Indeed, multi-drug resistant TB is South Africa's biggest AMR problem – one caused by multiple factors, including inadequate diagnostic coverage, medicine stockouts, and patient adherence challenges. But it's not only TB. Treatments for HIV and STIs, malaria, and gastro-intestinal, urinary tract, and respiratory tract infections are all under threat. Bacterial infections that are resistant to multiple drugs are commonplace in South African hospitals. People with these infections face longer, more uncomfortable treatment regimens, and have a lower likelihood of survival. Often, it is high-risk and vulnerable populations, including children, pregnant women and people with HIV that suffer the most.

In 2018, the Department of Health published their second version of its AMR national strategy to include animal health objectives. The strategy has five strategic objectives:

- (1) Strengthen, coordinate, and institutionalise interdisciplinary and intersectoral efforts,
- (2) Improve the appropriate use of diagnostic investigations to identify pathogens, guide patient and animal management and ensure good quality laboratory systems,
- (3) Optimise surveillance and early detection of AMR,
- (4) Enhance Infection Prevention and Control, and
- (5) Promote appropriate use of antimicrobials in humans and animals.

There are also strategic enablers to support these objectives, such as: Legislative and policy reform for health systems strengthening, Education and workforce development. Communication and Research.

The National Department of Health and Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries have collectively engaged to determine the key interventions that will form the basis for this strategy considering the recommendations from the WHO and OIE. The development and implementation of a National Antimicrobial Resistance Strategy Framework that complements international efforts is a major step towards containment of the growing threat of antimicrobial resistance in human and animal health. Global partnerships need to be strengthened because the responsibility for reducing resistance is a shared one. This responsibility is not only limited to the health care sector but calls for collaborative action in all sectors - human, animal, and agriculture. The National Antimicrobial Resistance Strategy Framework will affect South Africa's response to this looming threat. We already have the tools and expertise to make a difference, now all we need is to work together toward a better future.

I hope all attendees will appreciate what is on offer during the course of these webinars, and much thanks to the presenters for sharing their important knowledge in this wide-reaching area of AMR.

I thank you

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