

ECDC Director's Speech

Office of the Director

Highlights of speech by Marc Sprenger, Director High-level roundtable on tackling antimicrobial resistance 7 April 2011, Strasbourg

"Doctors are running out of ammunition against superbugs" Director warns MEPs

Dr Marc Sprenger today told Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) that doctors are running low on ammunition in the fight against antibiotic resistant "super bugs". At a roundtable meeting to mark World Health Day the ECDC Director warned MEPs in particular about the danger posed by the emergence of a new generation of "super bugs" that are almost totally resistant to antibiotics: carbapenemase-producing enterobacteria (or CPE).

CPE bugs are near to being the infectious disease doctors' nightmare – the untreatable infection. They potentially represent a greater threat to public health than "superbugs" such as MRSA.

Dr Sprenger then showed result of an EU funded survey on the spread of CPE in the European Union¹, noting to MEPs that "most EU countries are reporting cases of CPE."

CPE are almost totally resistant to antibiotics. Only a few antibiotics remain as treatment options. And these often are old antibiotics, developed several decades ago, that have limitations and side-effects.

This is the public health background for this morning's debate on the need for new antibiotics. The simple truth is that doctors are running low on ammunition against resistant bacteria.

Europe, and indeed the world, desperately needs new antibiotics. If we do not act today, then tomorrow the nightmare becomes reality. We will see increasing numbers of patients with untreatable infections.

It's not too late to act!

The ECDC Director called for action on three fronts. Development of new classes of antibiotics that can defeat multi-resistant bacteria. Better hygiene in hospitals and clinics to stop these bacteria spreading. And, more than ever, prudent use of antibiotics.

Prudent use means only using antibiotics when they are needed, and using them with the correct doses and for the correct duration. It is important for politicians, health officials and other stakeholders to advocate for this. So I hope you will all be active again on European Antibiotic Awareness Day² on 18 November.

ⁱ Grundmann H, et al. Eurosurveillance 2010;15(46). pii: 19711 Funding source: European Commission, DG Research, project number 223031 (TROCAR).

ⁱⁱ For more information on European Antibiotic Awareness Day and how to participate in it see <http://antibiotic.ecdc.europa.eu>