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Over the past decades, irresponsible and incorrect use of antibiotics in human and veterinary medicine has accelerated the emergence and spread of resistant bacteria. The situation is worsened by the lack of investment to develop new effective antibiotics.

The consequences of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) are severe, as has been shown in a joint technical report from the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the European Centre for Disease Prevention (ECDC). Both agencies estimated that each year about 25,000 patients in the European Union (EU) died from an infection due to multidrug resistance bacteria. AMR is therefore a priority for the Commission with wide policy and legislative initiatives developed over the past few years in human and veterinary medicines for the control or prevention of AMR.

To further strengthen its commitment, the European Commission launched in November 2011, a 5 year Action Plan against the rising threats of AMR. The Plan is based on a holistic approach, in line with the “One Health” initiative. The plan aims at strengthening the prevention and control of AMR across all sectors and at securing the availability of new antimicrobial agents. The plan describes 12 detailed concrete key actions in 7 different attention areas, both in the human and veterinary field.

One of the key areas of the action plan is the promotion of the appropriate and prudent use of antimicrobials in human and veterinary medicines. A reduction of overall use of antimicrobials and better targeted treatments in animals and humans will imply a reduction of the development of AMR. In addition to the legal tools to ensure prudent use of antimicrobials in the veterinary sector, EU guidance for prudent use to be implemented by Member States is developed by the European Commission.