

Statement of the WHO Representative in Iraq

Baghdad, Iraq, 19 November 2020 – Iraq joins the global community this week in marking World Antimicrobial Awareness Week, which is celebrated from 18 to 24 November to increase awareness of global antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and encourage best practices among the general public, health workers and policy-makers to stop the further emergence and spread of drug-resistant infections. As resistance grows to a wider range of drugs, the theme has been broadened for this campaign from antibiotics to all antimicrobials – “United to preserve antimicrobials.”

Antimicrobial resistance is a rising threat to human health. It is currently one of the top 10 public health threats facing humanity across the world. Antimicrobial resistance occurs when drugs such as antibiotics are misused or overused, making them less effective, and in some cases, completely ineffective. AMR occurs when bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites change over time and no longer respond to medicines making infections harder to treat and increasing the risk of disease spread, severe illness and death. AMR is worsening globally due to poor hygiene and infection prevention and control measures in communities and health facilities, lack of community awareness, and self-prescribing of antimicrobials.

Antimicrobials do not treat viruses, they treat bacterial infections and the extensive unnecessary use of antibiotics during the current COVID-19 pandemic might contribute to the increasing threat of bacterial resistance in the future.

Human and animal health workers should prescribe and dispense antibiotics only when they are genuinely needed, and they can limit the spread of infections through good hygiene and sanitation practices.

As individuals, we can ensure that we only use antibiotics when prescribed by a licensed health professional and take the full prescribed course. We can also play a part in preventing infections and reducing the need for antibiotics by frequently washing our hands and covering our mouths when coughing or sneezing.

If no action is immediately taken to control antibiotics misuse, drug resistance could cause around 7000 deaths globally per year, which will grow further to 10 million by 2050. Improving water, sanitation, and hygiene is fundamentally important in preventing disease, ensuring that contaminated waste containing resistant microbes does not enter human and animal food systems, and limits antibiotic use in livestock and aquafarming.

WHO is working with the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations in Iraq to support the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture to strengthen their response to AMR, using the "One Health" integrated surveillance across human health, food chain, and environment sectors. With WHO's support, the Ministry of Health has developed a national action plan for AMR and the plan is supporting action across the country. WHO, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, has also conducted capacity-building on AMR surveillance.

WHO reiterates its commitment to prioritize antimicrobial resistance in line with WHO's regional Vision 2023, and in this regard, I urge everyone; the media, public health, and animal workers and the general public to join us, during this World Antimicrobial Awareness Week to combat antimicrobial resistance.

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