

National

Doctors seek controls on use of antibiotics

BOSTON — Worldwide overuse of antibiotics as a cureall is feeding the growth of deadly bacterial superstrains that resist any known treatment — at a rate threatening global health, scientists say.

"It's getting worse at a speed none of us expected," says Dr. Stuart B. Levy of Tufts University Medical School.

Levy is one of a group of doctors from the United States, Brazil, Mexico and the Dominican Republic who Tuesday banded with others from Europe and Asia in putting out the first international call for controls on antibiotic use.

If nothing is done, said Dr. Walter Gilbert, a Nobel laureate and Harvard University molecular biology professor, "We can look forward to a time when 80 to 90 percent of all infections" are resistant to current treatments.

As a result, bacteria easily killed by these drugs are being wiped out and resistant forms, such as the widely publicized new strain of gonorrhea, are taking their place — sometimes causing death when not detected in time.

When penicillin came into use in the 1940s, it cured nearly 100 percent of all infections caused by the common staphylococcus germ, said Dr. George Jacoby Jr. of Harvard. Now it's effective in only 10 percent.

A typhoid epidemic in Guatemala recently killed

up to 13,000 people because the microbe causing the disease shrugged off the two standard forms of treatment.

Levy, Gilbert and Jacoby called for an international code governing use, distribution and advertisement of antibiotics.

They blamed their colleagues for passing out pills and shots too often and for ailments on which they have no effect — such as the flu. They said doctors, as well as patients, drug companies and advertisers, must be educated.

"The wise doctor is cautious about giving antibiotics unless he knows it's a disease that's going to respond," Gilbert said. "All the flus, all the viruses — there's nothing you can do but let it run its course. Giving an antibiotic is a total fake."

In addition, they issued a statement echoing their concerns by 150 physicians from 25 countries. The statement was prepared in January at a five day international meeting in Santo Domingo.

The Boston doctors said they were joined by colleagues at simultaneous news conferences in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Mexico City and Santo Domingo.

They said the problem is much greater in Europe and developing nations where there often are no regulations governing antibiotic use or where such drugs are much more widely distributed. In Japan, Levy said, they are used widely in the fish-raising industry.



Pint-sized pitcher

Photo by Denise Richter

Five-year-old Alfredo Pastora works on his pitching technique near Mount Aggie. Benito Pastora, Alfredo's father, said he brings his three children out to practice baseball twice a week. Mr. Pastora is a graduate physics student.

TV blackout ends in Oregon town

ELK CITY, Ore. — The antennas are slowly returning to Elk City, ending a three-month television blackout that got mixed reviews from residents of the small logging community.

"One guy's got his antenna back up and I'm going to put mine back up, hopefully, sometime this month," said Ted Stopyak, owner of the Elk City general store. "I've got to buy 1,200 feet of cable."

Stopyak was ready when Publisher's Paper Co., owner of forest land around the town, gave permission for residents to re-erect their antennas on a high ridge in the Oregon Coast Range about 30 miles from the Pacific.

The firm had disconnected the community's four TV antennas while it logged the area.

"When you sit in this store 14 hours a day, seven days a

week, it gets dull," said Stopyak. "You can only read so many magazines and papers and play so many games of Scrabble."

"My wife really missed the soaps," said Stopyak, who moved to Oregon from Chicago two years ago. "She couldn't wait to turn them back on."

Others in the community of 15 residences took the forced withdrawal from TV in stride, and some have decided they may never go back to watching the tube.

For Kay Parks, her husband and two teenage sons, it was a time to get in more fishing, haul and cut a winter supply of wood, plant a garden, and for the boys to play baseball and compete in track.

"We got a lot more done," she said. Nevertheless, she admitted her family isn't ready to give

up TV entirely.

"We'll be glad to have it again when fall comes," she said. Dutch Mauch, a neighbor of the Parks, said he had no trouble giving up TV since he found he got "more local news" listening to his radio.

People who live even further back in the woods than those at Elk City already had gone through the TV withdrawal problem two or three years ago when Publisher's Paper logged in their area.

Pauline Parks, who said she lives in the "suburbs of Elk City" some 3 miles away from the community and a mile from her nearest neighbor, said she is glad to have TV back again.

"I've been sick a lot lately, otherwise I wouldn't watch it so much," she said.

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Reagan asks for Saudi plane sale

WASHINGTON — President Reagan has written to congressional leaders saying he wants to complete the sale to Saudi Arabia of five AWACS reconnaissance planes because it will boost security and the United States' position in the region.

A copy of the letter to the leaders, a preliminary step toward formal notice to Congress of the sale, was made available to United Press International Tuesday.

Sources said Reagan wrote to Senate Republican Leader Howard Baker of Tennessee, Senate Democratic Leader Robert Byrd of West Virginia, House Speaker Thomas O'Neill of Massachusetts and House GOP Leader Bob Michel of Illinois stating he will submit the military package for the Saudis in the near future.

The State Department announced last week formal notification would be made Sept. 9. Congress would then have 30 days to disapprove the sale by majority votes of both houses. Unless vetoed in that fashion, the sale will take place.

"I am convinced that providing Saudi Arabia with this equipment will improve the security of our friends, strengthen our own posture in the region, and make it clear both to local governments and to the Soviet leadership the United States is determined to assist in preserving security and stability in Southwest Asia," Reagan wrote.

Airborne Warning and Control Systems planes are super-sophisticated, four-engine jets outfitted with radar and other spying equipment. They are capable of monitoring a wide area for signs of military activity.

"I am aware information from a variety of sources has been circulating on Capitol Hill regarding this sale and many members have been under some pressure to take an early position against it," Reagan said.

"I hope that no one will prejudice our proposal before it is presented," he said. "We will make a strong case to the Congress that it is in the interest of our country, the Western alliance and stability in the Middle East."

Reagan said one of the "essential elements" of the administration's strategy for the oil-rich region "is to provide Saudi Arabia with a package of equipment and training to improve its air defense capabilities."

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