Hold the Antibiotics: McDonald’s

McDonald’s raises the bar for responsible antibiotic use in beef

The Big Mac is taking a big bite out of the overuse of antibiotics.

In December, McDonald’s released a new policy to restrict medically important antibiotics in its beef supply chain. It will monitor antibiotic use in its top 10 global beef sourcing markets and set reduction targets by the end of 2020.

Whether you eat at McDonald’s or not, this is an important step forward for public health. We rely on antibiotics to treat life-threatening infections and to ensure that surgery, chemotherapy and other medical procedures are safe. But the overuse of antibiotics is leading to the spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, called “superbugs,” that are now shaking the foundations of modern medicine.

“The Golden Arches just raised the bar for responsible antibiotic use in meat production,” said Matt Wellington, director of our national Stop the Overuse of Antibiotics campaign. “McDonald’s new commitment is a promising step forward that will help preserve antibiotics for the future, and that’s something we should all be happy about.”

Misuse of antibiotics is one of the biggest threats to global health today

While overuse in medical settings is a factor in the rise of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, industrialized livestock operations—like the ones that supply McDonald’s beef—play an outsized role in this looming public health threat.

A staggering 70 percent of medically important antibiotics are sold for use in livestock and poultry operations here in the United States. These drugs are routinely given to animals to help them survive crowded, stressful and unsanitary conditions, regardless of whether the animals are actually sick.

The stakes couldn’t be higher. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conservatively estimates that at least 2 million Americans are sickened and 23,000 die each year as a direct result of antibiotic-resistant infections. However, recent estimates suggest more than 150,000 Americans died of antibiotic-resistant infections in 2010.

The World Health Organization has called antibiotic resistance “one of the biggest threats to global health, food security and development today.”

Commitments from McDonald’s, KFC, Subway and more

We shouldn’t allow the meat industry to misuse our life-saving medicines just to make cows a little fatter and burgers a little cheaper.

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GET THE LEAD OUT

California protects its youngest: Law requires day care centers to test for lead in water

The lives and futures of more than 600,000 California children will soon get a little healthier.

On Sept. 22, then-Gov. Jerry Brown signed a CALPIRG-backed law requiring all day care centers licensed by the Department of Social Services to test their water for lead starting in 2020. An estimated 600,000 children in the state’s day care centers and preschools drink water that could be contaminated with lead. Children are especially vulnerable to lead poisoning, with consequences ranging from anemia to neurological damage.

“There is a gap here in ensuring safety for all of our students, and we want to make sure the youngest and most vulnerable are protected,” said the bill’s primary author, Assemblymember Chris Holden.

The law is a step forward for California and an example for the rest of the country. However, we think our state can and should take stronger action by taking proactive measures to remove all lead-bearing parts and plumbing from schools.

PIRG CONSUMER WATCHDOG

California passes strongest net neutrality law in the country, Justice Department sues

The Trump administration is going to court to stop net neutrality in California.

On Sept. 29, then-Gov. Jerry Brown signed a law that prohibits telecommunications companies from blocking or slowing down internet access for broadband customers—the strongest net neutrality law in the nation. Within hours, the Justice Department sued to stop it, arguing that California’s law was illegal since the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has sole authority to create rules for broadband internet.

“With the rollback of strong net neutrality rules at the FCC, California’s law steps in to help ensure consumers still have access to an open Internet,” said CALPIRG Executive Director Emily Rusch. This legal challenge is the latest in a string of court battles over net neutrality: 20 state attorneys general have filed suit against the federal rollback of net neutrality. U.S. PIRG and other consumer groups support a free and open internet.

21ST CENTURY TRANSPORTATION

California Air Resources Board unanimously votes to switch to zero-emissions buses

Cleaner, healthier buses will soon be coming to every city in California.

Sixteen transit agencies, including all of those in San Francisco and Los Angeles, have already committed to switching their buses to zero-emission technology, and many more are eager to join them. In December, the California Air Resources Board voted to adopt a plan to switch all of the state’s buses to zero-emission batteries or fuel cell technologies by 2040.

CALPIRG Education Fund Executive Director Emily Rusch testified before the board on Sept. 28. “All-electric buses are here,” Emily said. “And they’re cleaner, healthier and often cheaper for transit agencies and school districts to run in the long term.”

Committing to zero-emission buses is another way California can once again set an example for the rest of the country on public health and the environment.
McDonald’s raises the bar for responsible antibiotic use in beef

For years, CALPIRG and our national network have called on major restaurants, including McDonald’s, to take action. And our advocacy helped persuade McDonald’s to stop serving chicken raised on our life-saving medicines in 2015—a commitment that helped push chicken supplier Tyson Foods to start raising its chickens without routine antibiotics.

KFC, Subway and other restaurants and suppliers quickly followed suit, and we estimate that soon nearly half of all chicken in this country will be raised without the routine use of medically important antibiotics.

McDonald’s newest commitment to reduce the routine use of medically important antibiotics in its beef supply is the culmination of over a year’s work by CALPIRG and our coalition partners.

More than 80 international stakeholders, including health, environmental and consumer groups, called on McDonald’s to act. We organized top medical professionals across the country to speak out about the health risks, and our national network delivered more than 150,000 petition signatures to McDonald’s headquarters during its annual shareholder meeting.

Setting off a chain reaction

In October 2018, CALPIRG Education Fund held an event outside of McDonald’s headquarters to release the collaborative “Chain Reaction IV” report grading the top 25 U.S. burger chains on their antibiotics policies.

McDonald’s received an “F” in the report, and later responded that the company would release a global antibiotics policy for its beef by the end of the year.

Today, we’re pleased that McDonald’s followed through on its pledge to take the next step in restricting antibiotics use. As the largest purchaser of beef in the U.S., McDonald’s action could spark an industry-wide change as the beef industry will now have to meet McDonald’s—and consumers’—demands to reduce the routine use of antibiotics in beef.

With McDonald’s taking an important step in the right direction, CALPIRG will continue to work with the burger chain that’s served billions to set strong reduction targets by the end of 2020.

“Consumers called on McDonald’s to hold the antibiotics,” said Matt. “Its response shows progress, and we look forward to seeing the company continue to use its size for good when it comes to preserving life-saving antibiotics.”

By Matt Wellington, director
Campaign to Stop the Overuse of Antibiotics

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Ban Roundup

Jury finds Monsanto’s Roundup responsible for man’s terminal cancer

Monsanto has been held accountable for hiding the health risks of Roundup in a California courtroom.

In August 2018, a jury awarded millions in damages to Dewayne Johnson, a former school groundskeeper who claimed his terminal non-Hodgkin lymphoma was caused by years of using the herbicide Roundup. Twenty-six million pounds of Roundup are sprayed on school grounds, parks and gardens every year, and Johnson’s case was the first to go to trial of more than 800 patients suing Monsanto.

“I would never have sprayed that product on school grounds or around people if I knew it would cause harm,” Johnson testified. His lawyer said, “We were finally able to show the jury the secret, internal Monsanto documents proving that Monsanto has known for decades that ... Roundup could cause cancer.”

As the evidence against Roundup piles up, CALPIRG is working to protect our public health by banning the herbicide in California. Twenty-four California cities have already taken action to ban or heavily restrict the use of Roundup on city-owned property.

Thanks to you

Dear CALPIRG member,

This winter, CALPIRG and our national network celebrated when McDonald’s announced it would cut routine antibiotic use in its beef supply chain. It’s a welcome victory for public health and it wouldn’t have been possible without the support of members like you.

Thank you,

Emily Rusch,
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