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# WEEKLY EU HEALTHCARE NEWS UPDATE

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# UN ENVIRONMENT REPORT: ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE

## DEATH TOLL COULD CATCH UP TO CANCER BY 2050

A new report, titled „Bracing for Superbugs” published by the UN Environment Programme, calls for more attention to be focused on the environmental factors fostering the development of strains of drug-resistant bacteria immune to all known antibiotics, under the name of “superbugs”. The UN estimates that by 2050, up to 10 million deaths could be caused by superbugs and associated forms of antimicrobial resistance (AMR), matching the annual global cancer death toll.

Drug resistance can develop naturally, but experts say the overuse of antimicrobials in people, animals, and food production has accelerated the process. Although most attention to AMR has been focused on the use of anti-microbial drugs in the healthcare and animal husbandry sector, the report highlights growing evidence that the environment is a significant factor in AMR’s growth, transmission, and spread. Research has shown that increased temperatures increase both the rate of bacterial growth and the spread of antibiotic-resistant genes between microorganisms.

The authors also emphasize that the health of people, animals, plants, and the environment are closely linked and interdependent. In this context, they call on governments to identify policies to limit antibiotic use in agriculture and reduce environmental pollution. Finally, experts say, measures to reduce climate change are steps to limit antimicrobial resistance. According to them, limiting antibiotic overuse and misuse is among the critical ones.

Source: <https://www.unep.org/resources/superbugs/environmental-action>

# EUROPEAN CHEMICALS AGENCY REVEALS PROPOSED RESTRICTON ON „FOREVER CHEMICALS“

**The European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) has published the much-awaited details of the proposed restriction of around 10,000 per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) on its website, with its scientific committees now set to evaluate the proposal's environmental, social, and health impacts.**

The proposal to reduce PFAS emissions into the environment and make products and processes safer for people was submitted on 13 January from 4 EU Member States – Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden – plus Norway, as its national environmental authority also closely cooperates with the EU agency. Subsequently, ECHA states that its Risk Assessment (RAC) and Socio-Economic Analysis (SEAC) committees are set to meet in March and determine whether the proposal meets the legal requirements of REACH. While RAC will evaluate its effectiveness in the context of health and the environment, SEAC will weigh up its benefits, costs, and other socio-economic impacts.

According to ECHA, the PFAS in question is detrimental to both human health and animal health, as well as the well-being of plants and the environment at large. With around 4.4 million tonnes of PFAS estimated to end up in the environment over the next 30 years at the current rate, the organization is pushing for changes to be made in the way that these chemicals are used. They are seen in the automotive and aviation sectors but also can be found in food contact materials, textiles, or household products. They can be gases, liquids, or solid high-molecular-weight polymers.

Source: <https://echa.europa.eu/pl/-/echa-publishes-pfas-restriction-proposal>

# WHO: WE SHOULD NOT ASSUME BIRD FLU RISK TO HUMANS WILL REMAIN LOW FOREVER

On Wednesday (February 8), Director General of the WHO Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus explained that cases of H5N1 influenza in minks, otters, foxes, and sea lions reported in recent weeks should be monitored closely. “For the moment, the WHO assesses the risk to humans as low,” he said. At the same time, he pointed out that “we cannot assume that will remain the case and we must prepare for any change in the status quo.”

An outbreak of a highly pathogenic H5N1 influenza strain, commonly known as bird flu, is decimating wild and farmed bird populations globally, fueling a debate about the most effective ways to end it and the potential risk to humans. Last week it was confirmed the disease has spilled to mammals in the UK, with otters and foxes testing positive for the virus. The current outbreak started in October 2021, sweeping through poultry farms and wild birds. The virus is highly infectious resulting in rapid illness and death in birds. In most instances where mammals become ill - including the otters and foxes in the UK - it's likely because they ate infected dead wild birds or their droppings.

In this regard, Dr. Ghebreyesus underlined that people were advised not to touch dead or sick wild animals and to instead report them to local and national authorities, who were monitoring the situation. The WHO also called on countries to strengthen surveillance in settings where humans and animals interact.

Source: <https://www.reuters.com/world/risk-humans-h5n1-bird-flu-remains-low-we-must-prepare-who-2023-02-08/>

# Thank you for your attention!

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