

Letter to FDA Comes After Study Reveals Probable Use of Banned Antibiotics in Chickens

WASHINGTON – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28), the only microbiologist in Congress, today chided the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for its lack of attention to the use of antibiotics in farm animals after a study found that a byproduct of chickens called "feather meal" contained a banned class of antibiotics.

The class of antibiotics, fluoroquinolones, is illegal in poultry production because its misuse leads to antibiotic-resistant "superbugs" that can infect humans. Feathers, used in the study, contain residues of drugs an animal has eaten. Even though the study looked only at feathers, not meat, the uncertainties of what reaches the dinner plate are concerning.

In a letter to Secretary Hamburg, Slaughter requested that the FDA disclose its plan to investigate the illegal use of the antibiotic, banned since 2005, on poultry factory farms.

"I'm outraged by this," said Slaughter. "If the results of this study are accurate, then those culpable for endangering public health must be held fully accountable. This is really just a symptom of the bigger problem, which is that the FDA has continued to drag its feet in addressing this looming public health crisis."

The study, conducted by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and Arizona State University, looked for drugs and other residues in feather meal, a common additive to chicken, swine, cattle and fish feed. The most important drugs found in the study were fluoroquinolones—broad spectrum antibiotics used to treat serious bacterial infections in people

In her letter, Slaughter asked the FDA to provide details of their planned response to the revelation, including how they will undertake the investigation, how many personnel they will assign to the investigation, and how they will bolster enforcement of the law.

In part Slaughter's letter said,

"Today, antibiotic-resistant infections kill more Americans than AIDS. This is simply unacceptable. The FDA is tasked with protecting the health and well-being of the American people. Despite this mandate, the FDA has not acted in the best interest of public health by continuing to postpone, prolong, and de-prioritize important measures that are necessary to protect the American people."

Since 2007, Congresswoman Slaughter has been the author of legislation titled The Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act (PAMTA), designed to ensure that we preserve the effectiveness of antibiotics for the treatment of human disease. The legislation would prevent the overuse of seven classes of antibiotics.

[For more on her work to protect public health, click here.](#)

[For a copy of the letter, click here.](#)