



AESGP Position Paper

Antimicrobial resistance: the Self-Care Industry is part of the solution

AMR is as urgent as climate change

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a pressing public health threat that can affect anyone globally. 33.000 people (the equivalent to a small town total number of inhabitants) die every year from antibiotic resistant infections (1).

AMR occurs when bacteria become resistant to the action of the antibiotic(s) used to kill them. Misuse and overuse of antibiotics have been identified as leading causes of AMR.

According to OECD, AMR is already a major public health tragedy that compromises the **sustainability of health systems** and poses a threat of a post-antibiotic era in the future (2).

The European Union aspires to be a global leader in the fight against AMR and has developed an ambitious **Action Plan on AMR** (3). One of the main objectives of the Action Plan is to support and assist Member States in developing and implementing national action plans.

According to the latest Eurobarometer, 57% of Europeans are not aware that **antibiotics are ineffective against viruses** and 44% do not know that antibiotics are not effective against the common cold and flu. Also, 56% of people prescribed with antibiotics have not taken any **specific test to confirm the probable cause of infection**. Therefore, it is as important as ever to improve general knowledge and raise population's health literacy on this topic (4). These figures demonstrate the continuing need to increase education around AMR.

Action on AMR is as urgent as on climate change. Only if all relevant stakeholders act together, can we avoid that, by 2050, more than 10 million people die every year as a result of drug-resistant infections (5).

About

The **Association of the European Self-Care Industry (AESGP)** is a non-profit organisation which represents the manufacturers of non-prescription medicines, food supplements and self-care medical devices in Europe, an area also referred to as consumer healthcare products.

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Self-care products are useful to prevent infections and avoid the need for antibiotics



Being in good health, with a strong immune system, can help **prevent infections**. This can be achieved with healthy lifestyle choices, good personal hygiene, regular exercise and a good nutrition.

Handwashing is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of many types of infection, which in turns helps reduce the need for antibiotics.

This also holds true for safe sexual intercourse. Using condoms is a proven method to avoid the spread of sexually transmitted infections, such as gonorrhoea, chlamydia, syphilis and E. coli (some with resistance strains).

The use of over-the-counter (OTC) or non-prescription medicines, self-care medical devices and food supplements (including minerals and vitamins) enables people to maintain good health and treat the symptoms of common winter illnesses. They contribute significantly in case of viral illnesses that are **often wrongly perceived as treatable by antibiotics.**

Investing in public awareness and systems for the correct disposal of medicines

Often in partnership with public institutions and healthcare professionals, **members of the European Self-Care Industry have developed public health and health literacy campaigns at the national level** to increase health literacy and educate European citizens on the appropriate management of common winter illnesses, such as cold and flu, and on infection prevention. Initiatives like the IPHA-IPU campaign “Be Well This Winter” or the APIFARMA program “Tratar de mim” are just a few examples.

The Self-Care Industry, through AESGP, is a partner of the [MedsDisposal campaign](#). This pan-European interdisciplinary stakeholder collaboration is a joint initiative that raises awareness on the **appropriate disposal of expired or unused medicines, in-**

cluding antibiotics, in Europe. It includes associations representing European healthcare professionals, industry, student organizations and civil society.



An important feature of the project is an **interactive map of Europe** with direct links to the official websites providing information on the appropriate way of disposing medicines in each country in the national language (s).



Self-care empowers patients by increasing health literacy on AMR

A wide range of health conditions can be self-diagnosed, self-treated, self-monitored and/or resolved by self-care products or services.

Up to 80% of winter illnesses (such as common cold, flu, sinusitis, bronchitis, etc.) are caused by viruses. Most symptoms can be alleviated with the use of non-prescription medicines. They enable people to carry on with their day-to-day lives (go to work, carry out household tasks) and shorten recovery times.

Improving general knowledge and raising population's health literacy on antimicrobial resistance is an important step to keep antibiotics working. According to the 2018 Eurobarometer, 57% of Europeans are not aware that antibiotics are ineffective against viruses and 44% do not know that antibiotics are not effective against the common cold and flu. This is an appalling reality considering that up to 80% of winter illnesses are caused by viruses and therefore do not require any treatment by antibiotic.

Within the promotion of self-care, there is an opportunity to promote health, prevent disease, maintain health, and cope with illness and disability, with or without the support of a healthcare provider (6).

The self-care agenda includes raising awareness about antimicrobial resistance and the importance of a responsible use of antibiotics.

The Self-Care Industry is committed to leading and championing the self-care agenda with a mission to advance responsible self-care, enabling citizens to take better care of their health needs, and **contribute to the sustainability of European healthcare systems.**

Since 2018, **the Self-Care Industry, through AESGP, is a proud official partner of the European Antibiotic Awareness Day (EAAD)**, an annual European public health initiative led by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) that takes place on 18 November to raise awareness about the threat to public health of antibiotic resistance and the importance of prudent antibiotic use.



Brussels, 18 November 2019

Updated November 2020

(1) *Attributable deaths and disability-adjusted life-years caused by infections with antibiotic-resistant bacteria in the EU and the European Economic Area in 2015* (ECDC, November 2018) [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099\(18\)30605-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099(18)30605-4/fulltext)

(2) *Averting the AMR crisis: What are the avenues for policy action for countries in Europe?* (OECD, November 2016) <https://www.oecd.org/health/health-systems/AMR-Policy-Insights-November2016.pdf>

(3) *EU Commission One Health Action Plan against AMR (COM(2017)339)* (EC, November 2018) https://ec.europa.eu/health/amr/sites/amr/files/amr_action_plan_2017_en.pdf

(4) *Special Eurobarometer 478 – Wave EB90.1 – Report on Antimicrobial Resistance* (EC, November 2018) <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/84386>

(5) *No time to wait: securing the future from drug-resistant infections.* (WHO, April 2019) https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/no-time-to-wait-securing-the-future-from-drug-resistant-infections-en.pdf?sfvrsn=5b424d7_6

(6) *Self care for health* (WHO, 2014) <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/205887>

