# Government faces scrutiny over response to superbugs crisis



Superbugs are increasingly becoming a critical concern in the UK, with the government facing scrutiny over its inadequate response to this growing public health crisis, as highlighted in a recent report by the National Audit Office (NAO).

The World Health Organization classifies antimicrobial resistance (AMR) as one of the foremost global health threats, wherein pathogens adapt and develop resistance to antibiotics and other antimicrobial agents. In the UK alone, AMR is linked to more than 35,000 deaths annually, signalling an urgent need for effective containment and management strategies.

The NAO's report, published on Wednesday, indicates that despite the government's recognition of the gravity of AMR, it has made “limited progress” toward its goal of controlling and containing this threat. The report underscores that the government is “still a long way” from achieving its envisioned goals of decreasing infection burdens, optimising antimicrobial usage, and developing new treatments to ensure that common diseases remain treatable.

Out of five domestic targets established in 2019, only one—reducing antibiotic usage in food-producing animals—has been met. The data shows a troubling increase in drug-resistant infections among humans, which have escalated by 13% since 2018, contradicting an initial aim that set a 10% reduction.

Gareth Davies, head of the NAO, stated, "Antimicrobial resistance presents a major public health threat, and addressing it is a multifaceted challenge. Government is responding, but, so far, the results have been limited and the country needs to become more resilient to this long-term risk.” He further emphasised the necessity for the government to evaluate whether its current commitments will suffice to fulfil its 20-year vision regarding AMR.

Compounding these issues, the Covid-19 pandemic has altered the landscape, as patients with more pre-existing conditions are entering hospitals and extending their stays. This situation heightens the risk of opportunistic infections. The state of NHS infrastructure, marked by deteriorating buildings, further complicates infection control measures.

Forecasts indicate that by 2050, AMR could directly result in 1.91 million deaths each year globally, up from 1.14 million in 2021. Overall, AMR may contribute to 8.2 million deaths annually, increasing from 4.71 million.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, chair of the Committee of Public Accounts, remarked, "The world needs to take the problem of antimicrobial resistance seriously, and the UK government must lead by example. While the UK has been bold in its ambitions to try to address this issue, progress so far has been limited and public awareness is low.” He expressed that, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, AMR, described as the “silent pandemic,” warrants considerable attention to secure public health and the operational viability of the NHS.

In response to these concerns, the Department of Health and Social Care acknowledged that AMR poses a “serious global threat” and asserts it has set forth plans to tackle the issue. A representative stated, “We have made important progress, including reducing antibiotic use in meat and pioneering a world-first subscription model to incentivise the development of new treatments.”

The findings from the NAO offer a stark view of the current state of AMR management in the UK and the ongoing challenges that lie ahead in addressing this formidable public health issue.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6734e208b613efc3f1823095/ESPAUR-report-2023-2024.pdf> - This report from the UK Health Security Agency provides detailed insights into antimicrobial resistance (AMR) trends in England, highlighting the increasing burden of AMR and the challenges in managing it effectively.
* <https://www.clinicaltrialsarena.com/analyst-comment/uncontrolled-antimicrobial-use-deaths-superbugs/> - This article discusses the global rise in deaths due to superbugs, emphasizing the impact of uncontrolled antimicrobial use and the forecasted increase in MRSA cases, which aligns with the growing concern over AMR.
* <https://www.england.nhs.uk/2023/07/nhs-steps-up-battle-against-life-threatening-infections-following-successful-world-first-pilot/> - This NHS report highlights efforts to combat life-threatening infections, including drug-resistant superbugs, and underscores the urgency of addressing AMR in the UK.
* <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/antimicrobial-resistance> - The World Health Organization classifies antimicrobial resistance as a major global health threat, emphasizing its impact on public health and the need for effective management strategies.
* <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-launches-new-plan-to-tackle-antimicrobial-resistance> - This UK government announcement outlines plans to address AMR, including reducing antibiotic use and developing new treatments, reflecting efforts to tackle this public health issue.