# UK Launches Five-Year Plan to Combat Antimicrobial Resistance



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The UK government has launched a new five-year plan to tackle antimicrobial resistance (AMR). The plan aims to address the pressing global issue of superbugs, which are responsible for at least five million deaths annually, outpacing diseases such as HIV, malaria, and breast cancer. If unaddressed, AMR could lead to ten million deaths worldwide by 2050.

AMR occurs when bacteria and other microbes become resistant to the drugs designed to kill them. This problem is exacerbated in low-income countries, where inadequate access to clean water and proper sanitation facilities create environments conducive to the growth of harmful bacteria. In many of these regions, a significant percentage of healthcare centers lack basic hygiene measures, resulting in healthcare-acquired infections among both patients and frontline workers.

In addition to the human toll, the economic impact is substantial. Lack of adequate water, sanitation, and hygiene in health facilities costs seven countries in Sub-Saharan Africa $8.4 billion annually. In the UK, healthcare-acquired infections already cost the NHS approximately £2.1 billion each year.

The new plan underscores the importance of global access to water, sanitation, and hygiene in combating AMR. However, despite these commitments, the UK’s annual bilateral Official Development Assistance budget for water, sanitation, and hygiene has been cut by about 77% since the COVID-19 pandemic.

There is strong cross-party and public support in the UK for overseas investment in basic sanitation and hygiene. According to a recent YouGov study, clean water is the most popular priority for overseas aid among the British public.

The UK government’s plan aligns with international efforts, such as the upcoming United Nations High Level Meeting on antimicrobial resistance scheduled for September.

Tim Wainwright, Chief Executive of WaterAid, emphasized the need for concrete actions to accompany these commitments to effectively combat AMR and save lives globally.