

## What is World Health Day?

*World Health Day is celebrated on 7 April to mark the founding of WHO.*

Each year, the Organization selects a key health issue, and encourages people from all ages and all backgrounds to hold events that highlight the significance of this issue for good health and well-being. World Health Day provides a unique opportunity for communities from across the world to come together for one day to promote actions that can improve our health.

## What are antimicrobial agents?

Antimicrobial agents are medicines used to treat infections caused by microorganisms, including bacteria, fungi, parasites and viruses. The discovery of antimicrobials is one of the most important advances in health in human history – alleviating suffering from disease and saving billions of lives over the past 70 years.

Antimicrobials include antibiotics, chemotherapeutic agents, antifungals, antiparasitic medicines and antivirals.

**M**ost of us live longer and healthier lives today, partly because powerful and effective medicines – known as anti-microbials – are available to treat infectious diseases. Until the discovery and availability of antimicrobials in the 1940s, people died needlessly from infectious diseases. Today, none of us can imagine living in a world without antimicrobials.

**W**e are now on the brink of losing this precious arsenal of medicines. The use and misuse of antimicrobials in human medicine and animal husbandry over the past 70 years have increased the number and types of microorganisms resistant to these medicines, causing deaths, greater suffering and disability, and higher health-care costs.

**I**f this phenomenon continues unchecked, many infectious diseases risk becoming uncontrollable and could derail progress made towards reaching the health related United Nations Millennium Development Goals for 2015. Furthermore, the growth of global trade and travel allows resistant organisms to spread worldwide within hours.

## What is antimicrobial resistance?

Antimicrobial resistance – also known as drug resistance – occurs when microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses, fungi and parasites change in ways that render the medications used to cure the infections they cause ineffective. When the microorganisms become resistant to most antimicrobials they are often referred to as “superbugs”. This is a major concern because a resistant infection may kill, can spread to others, and imposes huge costs to individuals and society.

Antimicrobial resistance is facilitated by the inappropriate use of medicines, for example, when taking substandard doses or not finishing a prescribed course of treatment. Low-quality medicines, wrong prescriptions and poor infection control also encourage the development and spread of drug resistance. Lack of government commitment to address these issues, poor surveillance and a diminishing arsenal of tools to diagnose, treat and prevent also hinder the control of drug resistance.

# COMBAT DRUG RESISTANCE



Antimicrobial resistance is not a new problem but one that is becoming more dangerous. Many countries are taking action, but urgent and consolidated efforts are needed to avoid regressing to the pre-antibiotic era.

On **World Health Day 2011**, the World Health Organization (WHO) will issue a call for action to halt the spread of antimicrobial resistance by introducing a **six-point policy package** for all countries to combat antimicrobial resistance.

## WHO will call on everyone:

-  policy-makers and planners,
-  the public and patients,
-  practitioners and prescribers,
-  pharmacists and dispensers,
-  the pharmaceutical industry,

*...to think, act and take responsibility for combating drug resistance.*

For more information, go to:  
[www.who.int/world-health-day/2011](http://www.who.int/world-health-day/2011)

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no cure tomorrow

No action today,