

CDC Warns on Superbugs

By Betsy McKay

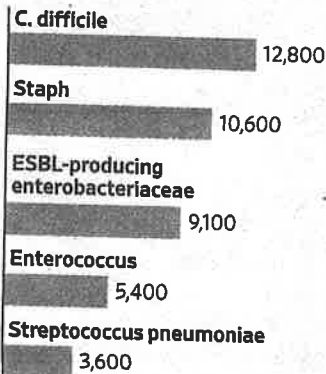
Drug-resistant bacteria and fungi, along with heavy use of antibiotics, fuel nearly 3.1 million infections with 48,700 deaths a year in the U.S., according to a new federal report that warns the toll from so-called superbugs is greater than previously known.

The findings from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, based on data from millions of patient electronic health records and other sources, update a 2013 report in which the agency sounded an alarm about the dangers of these bugs, some of which are resistant to many or most antibiotics.

Antibiotic-resistant bacteria and fungi, once confined mostly in hospitals, are spreading aggressively now in other health-care facilities and communities, the CDC warned. Doctors regularly struggle to find antibiotics that can effectively treat patients, and to operate on or provide cancer care to patients at

Antibiotic-resistant threats, proliferating in hospitals and communities, cause more than 48,000 deaths each year.

Estimated annual deaths from top infections



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

risk of infection.

"Our nation must stop referring to a coming post-antibiotic era—it's already here," CDC director Robert Redfield said in an introductory letter to the report released Wednesday.

The report identified 18

bacteria and fungi of concern, and new bugs are emerging rapidly, the CDC said. It included a "watch list" of pathogens identified elsewhere in the world, such as a drug-resistant form of *Bordetella pertussis*, bacteria that cause whooping cough.

"The problem of antibiotic resistance is worse than we previously thought," said Michael Craig, the CDC's senior adviser for antibiotic resistance. Someone in the U.S. develops an antibiotic-resistant infection every 11 seconds, and someone dies every 15 minutes, he said in an interview.

The new estimates include 223,900 cases, including 12,800 deaths a year from *Clostridium difficile* bacteria. Those bacteria aren't drug-resistant, but infections with them are fueled by use of antibiotics.

There is some good news, Mr. Craig said. The number of annual deaths from drug-resistant bacteria and fungi has declined 18% since 2013, excluding the deaths from *C. difficile*:

That improvement is due largely to steps hospitals have taken to prevent the spread of drug-resistant bugs, he said. Now, 84% of U.S. hospitals have a program in place to use antibiotics more judiciously, following CDC guidelines, according to the report.

Still, Mr. Craig said, more-dangerous bugs are spreading outside hospitals. They include drug-resistant gonorrhea and urinary-tract infections caused by bacteria with enzymes, called extended-spectrum beta-lactamases, or ESBLs, that break down and destroy many common antibiotics including penicillin. Urinary-tract infections caused by those bacteria can be life-threatening, Mr. Craig said.

New pathogens are also making their way to the U.S. *Candida auris*, a drug-resistant pathogen first identified in Asia in 2009, has quickly spread around the world, causing life-threatening infections, the report noted, listing it as one of five "urgent threats."