

Drug-Resistant Bacteria Found in US Meat  
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ORLANDO, FL (Reuters Health) May 24 - A preliminary survey of beef and poultry sold in US supermarkets, conducted by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), has found relatively high levels of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, according to a report presented here on Tuesday at the 101st annual meeting of the American Society for Microbiology.

In the study, researchers analyzed Enterococcus strains in meat bought at several Washington, DC-area supermarkets. The investigators found "fairly substantial amounts of resistance to a number of drugs" in the bacteria, FDA microbiologist Dr. David Wagner told conference participants.

Enterococci were found in 67% of the chicken samples, 34% of the turkey samples and 66% of the beef samples. The researchers tested for resistance to 29 different types of antibiotics, including 6 commonly used in animal feed. Strains of enterococci taken from either chicken or turkey tended to be "much more resistant to the antibiotics," compared with strains taken from beef, the researchers conclude.

He stressed that the study sample was relatively small — just 24 samples of beef were tested. Dr. Wagner said the findings suggest "that perhaps there's just wider low-level antimicrobial usage in poultry production than [there is] in routine use in beef."

While the sample is too small to determine the presence or extent of a possible health threat to the public, it may provide "background" that could help the FDA decide "whether or not we may want to take an intervention strategy" to reduce the amount or types of drugs used in US meat production facilities, Dr. Wagner added.

Before any of that is decided, "we would really need to take a more thorough look, probably a national sampling over some time," he said. "I think that's probably where this will lead."