

Animal health and welfare at risk worldwide from low uptake of vaccination, finds new report

Sub-optimal vaccination levels for pets and livestock have been driven by several factors including politics, costs, and an anti-vaccination movement, experts say.

September 23, 2019, BRUSSELS – Pets and livestock worldwide are unnecessarily suffering preventable diseases because of a slew of barriers holding back widespread vaccination, according to a [new report](#).

Obstacles such as new trade restrictions, the rising cost of research and development, and anti-vaccination attitudes are driving immunisation “below optimal levels,” findings suggest. The report warns this could lead to higher rates of animal mortality, the return of previously controlled diseases and increased risk of antibiotic resistance.

Authors of the assessment called on manufacturers, animal owners, veterinarians, and governments to take urgent action, offering 80 recommendations to help address the potential crisis.

“Vaccines are a cornerstone of health and a veterinarian’s most valuable tool for protecting animals from disease,” said **Carel du Marchie Sarvaas**, executive director of HealthforAnimals, which commissioned the report, *How to Increase Animal Vaccination*.

“But numerous barriers often stand in the way of adoption, such as protectionist tactics and trade barriers that ultimately limit the availability of vaccines.”

The report identified six overarching “barriers to vaccination”: economic, political, scientific, regulatory, field use and social.

For farmers and pet owners, economics are a “significant factor” in the decision to vaccinate an animal. Farmers may opt for treatment over prevention when evaluating costs, while one in five UK pet owners blamed cost for not vaccinating their animals.

Financial considerations were also a barrier to vaccine developers, with slow regulatory processes and restricted access to markets driving up the investment needed for new products.

The report suggests that anti-vaccination attitudes were also a “real, growing phenomenon”, causing some pet owners to leave their animals unprotected because of misconceptions around side-effects or efficacy.

Vaccines are also often caught in the middle of politics as protectionist policies limit vaccine availability in an effort to defend local companies from competition, the authors reported.

Other factors included limited access to veterinarians, bureaucracy and outdated or slow regulatory processes, which is leading to more global demand than supply for certain vaccines.

“Whether it’s a lack of access, a lack of understanding or a lack of expertise in administering vaccines, it’s imperative that we address this potential animal health crisis before diseases long considered wiped out start to return,” said **Roxanne Feller**, secretary general of AnimalhealthEurope.

“Pet vaccination levels in the UK, for example, are at their lowest recorded level. Widespread reduced immunity means our dogs and cats are left vulnerable to diseases that we should no longer have to worry about.”

Another consequence of suboptimal vaccination level was the increased likelihood of diseases that require antibiotic treatment, which then contributes to the rise of antibiotic resistance.

Recommendations for overcoming these barriers included efforts to improve the affordability and accessibility of vaccines, new legislation to encourage vaccination and greater collaboration between companies and governments.

“This important report also demonstrates why health authorities and agencies must be well-resourced, staffed with talent and open to collaboration with industry to assess the next generation of vaccines,” **Mr du Marchie Sarvaas** added.

“I encourage governments to take the recommendations of this report seriously when formulating their future strategies.”

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About

HealthforAnimals is a non-profit, non-governmental representing companies and industry associations from both developed and developing countries. HealthforAnimals represents the animal health sector: manufacturers of veterinary pharmaceuticals, vaccines and other

animal health products throughout the world, as well as the associations that represent companies at national and regional levels. www.healthforanimals.org