

## Urgent need for new antibiotics

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Sir, In November 2011 Antibiotic Action was launched to raise public awareness of the serious shortage of new antibiotics and its implications for the practice of medicine and public health. Until new drugs are available, it is essential that we preserve our current antibiotics and so we support the Department of Health’s “Start smart, then focus” campaign.

However, the number of antibiotic-resistant bacterial infections continues to increase; this includes “ordinary” infections such as urinary tract infections. The societal and financial costs are huge. In the EU in 2007, bloodstream infections caused by antibiotic resistant *E. coli* were associated with 2,712 deaths and 120,065 hospital days. The total cost attributable was estimated at €18.1 million (£14.5 million). Data from the Health Protection Agency shows that the numbers of such infections are increasing. Lack of action to discover and develop new drugs now threatens not only the management of infections by “superbugs” but also the success of many routine treatments and procedures including cancer chemotherapy, transplant surgeries and joint replacements.

We urge *Times* readers to sign the online Antibiotic Action petition ([antibiotic-action.com](http://antibiotic-action.com)). By this means governments and policymakers will become aware of the urgent need to provide sufficient resources to implement the national, EU and World Health Organisation action plans on antibiotic resistance, which include the development of new antibiotics.

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