

CDC: Drug-resistant bacteria a growing threat

By Brady Dennis and Brian Vastag, Los Angeles Times

The nation faces “potentially catastrophic consequences” if it doesn’t act quickly to combat the growing threat of antibiotic-resistant infections, which kill an estimated 23,000 Americans each year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned Monday.

In a 114-page report, the agency detailed for the first time the toll that nearly two dozen antibiotic-resistant microbes are taking on humans – ranking the threat of each as “urgent,” “serious” or “concerning.” Should the trend continue, it said, some infections could become essentially untreatable.

“More than two million people are sickened every year with antibiotic-resistant infections, with at least 23,000 dying as a result.”

“If we’re not careful, the medicine chest will be empty when we go there to look for a life-saving antibiotic,” CDC Director Thomas R. Frieden told reporters Monday in a telephone news conference. “Without urgent action now, more patients will be thrust back to a time before we had effective drugs.”

One family of bacteria atop the agency’s “urgent” list of infections is carbapenem-resistant Enterobacteriaceae (CRE), which typically strike patients in medical facilities and have become resistant to nearly all existing antibiotics. Known as the “nightmare bacteria,” CRE cause life-threatening diarrhea. They have continued to proliferate, showing up in medical facilities in 44 states, including the National Institutes of Health’s Clinical Center in Maryland, where seven people died from one type of CRE in 2011 and 2012.

Likewise, *Neisseria gonorrhoeae*, which causes the sexually transmitted disease gonorrhea, has begun showing resistance to the antibiotics typically used to treat it, the CDC said. The condition, which can cause severe reproductive complications, shows up in an estimated 800,000 cases annually in the United States.

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