Healthy Living

Sounding The Alarm On Antibiotics

Antibiotic overuse in any setting breeds deadly, antibiotic-resistant bacteria that put public health at risk.

Alarmed by the fact that 70 percent of medically important antibiotics in the U.S. are used on livestock and poultry—not humans—doctors and nurses are coming forward to raise the alarm about the misuse of our life-saving medicines in agriculture.

To make sure elected and corporate decision-makers hear from these experts about antibiotic resistance and what can be done to stop it, U.S. PIRG Education Fund created the Health Professional Action Network.

Already, more than 40,000 health professionals have signed on, and a group of doctors worked with us this summer to produce a video interview series about antibiotic resistance that is reaching thousands online.

As the biggest purchaser of beef in the country, a strong commitment from McDonald’s could change the entire food industry and save lives.

Citizen support also gives us the resources we need to advocate directly in the halls of power. In June, we joined other groups in support of a federal bill to enforce duration limits on antibiotics given to livestock, just like we require in human medicine.

Together with you, we’ll keep working at the state, national and corporate levels to protect the health of future generations.

Product Safety

Stores Stop Selling Deadly Paint Strippers

There are more than 80,000 chemicals on the U.S. market, many of which were never tested for their health impacts.

Drew Wynne’s parents saw the tragic consequences firsthand when their son died from using a paint stripper containing methylene chloride. After hearing Drew’s story in May, our national network joined a coalition effort to get dangerous paint strippers off store shelves.

First, we sent Lowe’s 7,000 petition signatures, urging them to drop these deadly products. Lowe’s listened, announcing it would do so before 2019. Next, we focused on Home Depot. After receiving thousands of comments, the retailer also announced plans to phase out these paint strippers.

With supporters like you by our side, MASSPIRG will continue protecting consumers from toxic threats hidden in plain sight.
Democracy

Automatic Voter Registration Signed Into Law

In August, after a four-year push by MASSPIRG and our partners, Gov. Charlie Baker signed a bill into law that establishes automatic voter registration.

“If there was a World Cup for election reform, passing automatic voter registration would definitely be a huge goal,” said Janet Domenitz, executive director of MASSPIRG. “Today, everyone who cares about democracy scored.”

Now, when eligible residents interact with agencies like the Registry of Motor Vehicles or MassHealth, they will automatically be registered to vote. An estimated 680,000 people who were previously unregistered to vote are now eligible.

The legislation was endorsed by 65 organizations, including Common Cause, the League of Women Voters and MassVOTE. With your support, we’ll continue modernizing our elections.

New Economy

Right To Repair Is The Fix We Need

If a product you own breaks, you should be able to fix it or find someone who can. But products ranging from dishwashers to smartphones are purposefully made to be difficult, if not impossible, to repair.

“While companies profit, the public is forced to pay the price in financial costs and environmental damage,” said Nathan Proctor, director of MASSPIRG's campaign for the Right to Repair.

When Microsoft pressed criminal charges against e-waste recycler Eric Lundgren for copying restore disks that allow people to fix old computers—even though the software on those disks is available online for free—we launched an effort to urge Microsoft to work with recyclers, not penalize them.

Our national network is supporting Right to Repair reforms in 18 states, because it shouldn’t be this difficult to keep our products away from the trash heap.

In a video, MASSPIRG Education Fund’s Mike Litt criticized the slowdown in consumer protections at the Consumer Bureau—but said the ability of the agency to protect consumers is largely still intact, thanks to our advocates, members and allies.

“As long as consumers keep speaking up, a future CFPB director will be able to ensure a fair and transparent marketplace for consumers and businesses alike,” said Litt.

21st Century Transportation

MASSPIRG Wins Increased Funding For Regional Transit

Despite providing 32 million rides a year, the Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) have gone years without adequate investment. Now, they’re getting an infusion of new funds, thanks in part to MASSPIRG’s advocacy.

On July 26, Gov. Charlie Baker signed a budget providing $88 million in funding for the RTAs. We were joined by more than 20 organizations in signing a letter to Gov. Baker, urging him to approve the funding.

“This is a big step in the right direction, but it is just the beginning,” said MASSPIRG Staff Attorney Matt Casale. “Moving forward, we need to expand and streamline public transit throughout the Commonwealth.”
Thanks To You

Dear MASSPIRG member,

It’s terrifying, but simple: If we continue misusing antibiotics, common infections could become a lot more deadly.

In July, MASSPIRG and our national network kicked off efforts to knock on 450,000 doors to educate people across the country about the overuse of our life-saving antibiotics in agriculture.

So far, tens of thousands have signed our petition asking McDonald’s to only buy beef and pork from farms that use antibiotics responsibly. By summer’s end, that number will have climbed to nearly 80,000, adding the power of consumer opinion to our research and advocacy.

Sure, there are food industry interests, as well as the power of “that’s just the way the world works,” standing in the way of solutions. But MASSPIRG stands for two different forces: the idea that there’s a public interest—a position that benefits all of us—and the idea that change is always possible.

This approach, combined with support from members like you, has helped us convince some of the country’s top restaurants to phase antibiotics out of their supply chains, and we hope McDonald’s will soon do the same.

From addressing antibiotic resistance, to protecting consumers in the financial marketplace, to getting toxic products off store shelves, we stand up for you—but we couldn’t do it without you.

Thank you,

Janet Domenitz, Executive Director
info@masspirg.org

PIRG Consumer Watchdog

Protecting Consumers In The Digital Age

Why do we let companies like Facebook and Equifax, who have done so much to advance digital technology, be so careless with our personal information? And why are we doing so little to hold them accountable when they make a mistake, or allow identity thieves to access our personal information?

These questions drive our national network’s efforts to implement better consumer protections and privacy laws in Massachusetts and across the country—work that is only possible thanks to members and supporters like you.

At the national level, while MASSPIRG and our network are excited to see bipartisan action for free credit freezes—an important protection that was included in a bill passed in May—the new federal law unfortunately preempts stronger state laws.

As our advocates told The New York Times, this law could undermine consumer protections that MASSPIRG and our affiliate groups helped establish in Massachusetts, Illinois, Maryland, Oregon and Washington over the past year.

With support from our members, we will keep encouraging consumers to use credit freezes to protect themselves, and continue looking for new opportunities to push for stronger protections against identity theft.

Progress In The States

MASSPIRG has also made important progress on data privacy at the state level—where protections can often lay the groundwork for federal action.

In California, our national network teamed up with the Consumer Attorneys of California to prevent future data breaches and make sure negligent companies can be held accountable. Together, we co-sponsored Senate Bill 1121 to make clear that consumers should have a private right to sue when a breach occurs.

Despite strong industry opposition, this policy was ultimately adopted as part of the California Consumer Privacy Act, which acts as a model for strong consumer protections in other states.

Permission To Use Our Data

To bring current privacy laws up to date with our digital world, MASSPIRG is recommending Congress pass a privacy bill of rights similar to the General Data Protection Regulation, a new privacy law that went into effect in the European Union in May.

“A cornerstone of the new European law is the requirement to obtain permission from consumers before their data can be used. In order to guarantee privacy from companies, Congress should pass legislation that requires permission from American consumers too,” said MASSPIRG’s Mike Litt.

YOUR ADVOCATE IN CONGRESS—MASSPIRG Consumer Campaign Director Mike Litt testifies before the House Financial Services Committee on the Equifax breach and data privacy laws.
Solid Waste

It’s Time To Stop Trashing Our Future

Nothing we use for a few minutes should threaten our health or pollute our future for hundreds of years—especially when we don’t need it.

But polystyrene foam, the stuff most of us call Styrofoam, persists in the environment for centuries—meaning every bit of it ever made is still out there clogging our landfills, littering our streets, and polluting our parks, rivers and oceans.

MASSPIRG supporters like you have already sent tens of thousands of comments asking state lawmakers to eliminate polystyrene cups and containers for good, but we’re just getting started.

If we’re successful in banning single-use polystyrene items, we’ll be moving one step closer to zero waste. We’ll see cleaner parks, streets and beaches, less overall waste choking our planet, and a more sustainable future to leave to our children and grandchildren.

This is something we can do right now, with your support.