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Antimicrobial resistance: Pharma pipeline projects drop by over a third

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Pharmaceutical projects to tackle the threat of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) have declined by over a third (35%) in the past five years, despite rising deaths caused by resistant infections.

The finding comes from a major benchmarking report by global health equity non-profit organisation Access to Medicine Foundation which analysed the efforts of pharmaceutical companies to tackle superbugs.¹

AMR has been declared as one of the top global public health and development threats by the World Health Organization. An estimated 1.27 million deaths were caused by resistant infections globally in 2019, while they contributed to around 4.95 million deaths.

In the UK the number of people who died with a resistant infection rose by almost 17% between 2023 and 2024, from 2041 to 2379.

This came as the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) warned that AMR infections are continuing to rise in England, with nearly 400 new cases reported each week in 2024.²

Access to Medicine Foundation's report found that since its last review in 2021 the number of AMR projects in the pipeline among the seven biggest pharmaceutical companies has dropped from 92 to 60.

Although a few smaller biotechnology firms have "stepped in" to fill some of these gaps, the report says they are "constrained by limited access to capital and a lack of global reach."

Jayasree Iyer, the foundation's chief executive, said, "Without significant change, AMR will cause a devastating rise in deaths from preventable infections over the next two decades, with vulnerable populations living in poorer countries hit the hardest."

Iyer warned there is "no time to lose" in tackling AMR. By 2050 direct and indirect AMR deaths are projected to rise to nearly two million and more than eight million, respectively.

Some positive progress has been identified by the report, however, with three large drug companies—GSK, Otsuka, Shionogi—being praised for "continuing to invest in innovative antimicrobial research and development."

Seven late stage projects targeting gonorrhoea, tuberculosis, resistant gram negative bacterial infections, and invasive fungal infections—of which four are from smaller companies (BioVersys, F2G, Innoviva, Venatorx)—have also been highlighted as promising.

"These target some of the deadliest drug resistant pathogens disproportionately affecting people living in low and middle income countries," the report said.

Survey data recently published by the UKHSA found that over a third (36%) of parents incorrectly assume their children always need antibiotics to treat ear infections, which they said showed the need for health leaders to tackle public knowledge about antibiotics and AMR.³

1 Access to Medicine Foundation. 2026 antimicrobial resistance benchmark. <https://accesstomedicinefoundation.org/insights-resources/amr-benchmark>

2 Mahase E. Antibiotic resistant infection deaths increasing in England, despite lower NHS antibiotic use. *BMJ* 2025;391. doi: 10.1136/bmj.r2397 pmid: 41232949

3 Hayes CV, Ahmed H, Robotham JV, Verlander NQ, Lecky DM. Parental health seeking behaviour, knowledge and expectations around ear infection symptoms in children. *BJGP Open* 2026;BJGPO.2025.0131. doi: 10.3399/BJGPO.2025.0131. pmid: 41633752