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.

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 helps us advocate directly in the halls of power. We’re currently working to ensure the Hogan administration enforces Maryland’s law to stop the routine use of antibiotics on farms in our state.

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.

“Maryland has been a leader in stopping antibiotic misuse on industrial farms,” said Maryland PIRG State Director Emily Scarr. “If implemented correctly, this new law will save lives.”

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 your support, Maryland PIRG will protect consumers by working to pass a statewide ban on the use of these deadly paint strippers.
News Briefs

Our 2018 Legislative Scorecard

This summer, Maryland PIRG released our 2018 Legislative Scorecard, which reviews legislators’ votes on key public interest issues. The bills selected include a range of legislation we worked on this session, such as modernizing our voter registration systems, protecting consumers from identity theft, supporting mass transit, and increasing transparency in political spending.

We took on the pharmaceutical industry, the chemical lobby, big banks and predatory lenders. We certainly didn’t win on everything, but we are proud of what we did accomplish—and of the state legislators who stood by our, and your, side.

If you’d like to see how your state legislators voted, visit our website to see the scorecard.

Now, thanks to your support, we’re gearing up for the upcoming year—with plans to ensure all eligible voters can make their voices heard, to ban toxic chemicals in consumer products, and more.

Consumer Defense

Defending The CFPB

Maryland PIRG’s national advocates have been hard at work urging lawmakers to pass a budget that doesn’t dismantle the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

On July 21, the Consumer Bureau celebrated a bittersweet seventh birthday. While Congress was making various anti-consumer moves, more than 100 groups joined Maryland PIRG Foundation in sending consumers a message of hope.

In a video, Maryland PIRG Foundation’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

Fix It First, Then Build For The Future

Nine highway projects across the country—slated to cost $30 billion—exemplify the need for a fresh approach to transportation planning and spending, according to Maryland PIRG Foundation’s fourth annual “Highway Boondoggles” report.

Released in June, the report explores projects from Maryland’s $9 billion “Traffic Relief Plan” to Texas’ $8.1 billion Interstate 35 expansion—projects that would do little to address congestion while diverting funding from repairs and 21st-century transportation priorities.

“In July, we scored another victory when Johnson & Johnson agreed to disclose fragrance ingredients in its baby products.

“We’re seeing a shift in the personal care products industry toward greater transparency,” said Maryland PIRG’s Dev Gowda, director of our campaign for toxic-free products. “Consumers are demanding it, and the industry is starting to listen.”

Zero Out Toxics

Companies Move Toward Toxic-Free Products

For Mother’s Day this year, Maryland PIRG and our national network sent more than 6,000 petition signatures to L’Oréal—the manufacturer behind brands like Garnier and Maybelline—urging the company to disclose the fragrance chemicals used in its products.

More than 3,000 chemicals can be used to make fragrance—some of which have been linked to cancer and reproductive and respiratory problems. Just weeks after our petition delivery, L’Oréal announced it would make this disclosure.

In July, we scored another victory when Johnson & Johnson agreed to disclose fragrance ingredients in its baby products.

“Consumers are demanding it, and the industry is starting to listen.”

ADVOCATING FOR THE PUBLIC—Maryland PIRG staff and volunteers headed to Annapolis during the legislative session to lobby on our state priorities.
Maryland Leads Efforts To Reform Our Democracy

Everyone should have an equal opportunity to influence our elections, regardless of income, race or gender. And political candidates should raise money from the people they are seeking to represent, with contributions limited to what the average voter can afford.

In Maryland, counties and cities are beginning to move toward a new way to fund elections, where candidates who voluntarily abide by these guidelines can compete with those accepting big checks from wealthy interests.

A Test In Montgomery County

Montgomery County’s June primary was the first test of the County’s Public Election Fund, which Maryland PIRG helped win thanks to member support. Candidates participating in the program had to reject contributions over $150 and all money from PACs, unions and corporations. Then, small donations from county residents were matched by the Fund to ensure that candidates could run competitive campaigns.

Of the 22 candidates who qualified, eight won their races, including the Democratic candidate for county executive, all four Democratic at-large seats, and a Republican candidate for Council District 2.

Once campaign finance reports are available, we expect the results will show a significantly higher number of small dollar donations than the county has seen previously, a lower average donation, and a weakened role of out-of-state money and big money from corporations, unions and PACs.

And despite more candidate participation than expected, the program will come in well below the expected cost. The State Board of Elections estimates the cost will come to less than $2 per Montgomery County resident per year.

Is Baltimore Next?

In November, Baltimore voters will decide if the city should move forward with small donor public financing. The Fair Elections Fund charter amendment, sponsored by Councilman Kristopher Burnett, was passed unanimously through the City Council, and was signed by Mayor Catherine Pugh in July.

“The days of big money politics in Baltimore are coming to an end,” said Maryland PIRG State Director Emily Scarr. “Baltimoreans can vote for the Fair Elections Fund this November and start building a democracy that works for citizens, not special interests.”

The matching funds would amplify the power of regular Baltimoreans’ contributions, while reducing the influence of developers, corporations and other wealthy interests that have previously wielded outsized influence in the city.

SUPPORTING FAIR ELECTIONS—Maryland PIRG State Director Emily Scarr (left of speaker) joined city councilmembers and coalition partners in support of the Baltimore Fair Elections Fund in advance of a legislative hearing.

Thanks To You

Dear Maryland PIRG member,

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

In July, Maryland PIRG 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 Maryland PIRG 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.

Emily Scarr, State Director
info@marylandpirg.org

Adam Abadir
Maryland PIRG

Fall 2018
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.

Maryland PIRG 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. In 2019, Maryland PIRG is joining a broad coalition to support a statewide plastic foam ban.

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.

WE HAVE A TRASH PROBLEM — This summer, our national network held beach cleanup events, like the one pictured above in Maryland, to raise awareness about plastic pollution and spur action at the local and state levels.