Punjab's antibiotic resistant poultry farms have set alarm bells ringing for human health!

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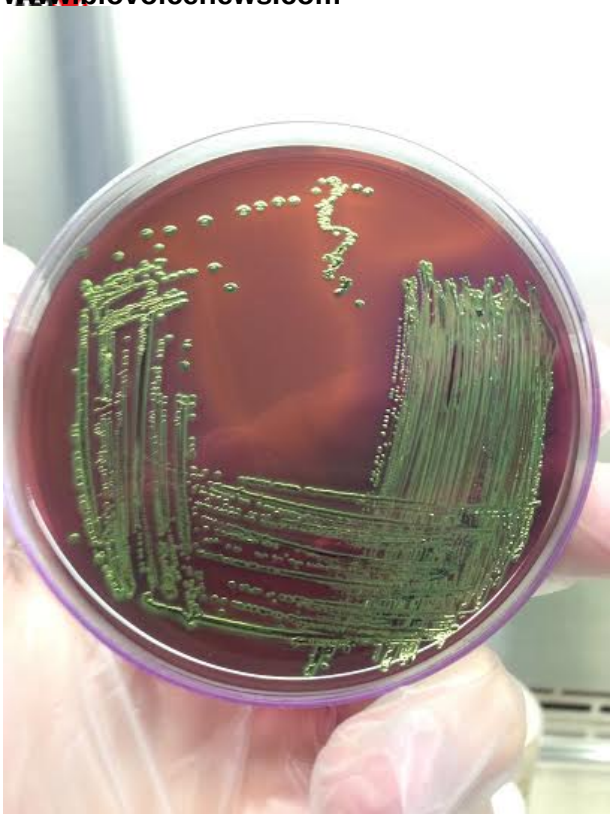
New Delhi: A new study led by researchers from the Center for Disease Dynamics, Economics and Policy (CDDEP), published in Environmental Health Perspectives, finds high levels of antibiotic-resistant bacteria in chickens raised for both meat and eggs on farms in Punjab.

The study raises serious concerns over the use of antibiotics for growth promotion in farm animals. For the study, the largest of its kind ever to be conducted in India, researchers collected more than 1500 samples from 530 birds on 18 poultry farms in six districts in Punjab and tested them for resistance to a range of antibiotics critical to human medicine.



• Two-thirds of the farms reported using antibiotics for growth promotion; these farms were also nearly three times more likely to report multi drug resistant bacteria than those that did not use antibiotics for growth promotion.

• Meat producing farms had twice the rates of antimicrobial resistance as compared to egg-producing farms, as well as higher rates of multidrug resistance.

• High levels of resistance to many important antibiotics were found across the board, ranging from 39 percent for ciprofloxacin, which is used to treat respiratory infections, to 86 percent for nalidixic acid, which is used to treat urinary tract infections.

• Almost 60 percent of the Escherichia coli (E. coli) samples analyzed contained 'resistance conferring' genes, that not only render many antibiotics ineffective but can also be easily passed on to other types of bacteria.

"Overuse of antibiotics in animal farms endangers us all as it multiplies drug

resistance in the environment," said study author and CDDEP Director Ramanan Laxminarayan. "Punjab is one of the leading states in India in poultry farming. It is critical that we take measures to end the use of antibiotics for growth promotion in animal breeding practices."

Antimicrobial growth promotion (AGP) use in farm animals is increasing worldwide in response to the rising demand for food animal products. Previous studies by CDDEP researchers have projected that antimicrobial consumption in food animal production will rise globally by 67 percent by 2030, including more than a tripling of use in India.

"This study has serious implications, not only for India but globally," adds Ramanan Laxminarayan. "We must remove antibiotics from the human food chain, except to treat sick animals, or face the increasingly real prospect of a post-antibiotic world."