

Burger King to cut use of antibiotics in its chicken as part of superbug fight

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Only chickens raised without antibiotics 'critical' to human medicine will be used, says owner of Burger King and Tim Hortons



Burger King and Tim Hortons will cut antibiotic use in its chickens amid growing concern overuse is reducing their effectiveness to fight infection in humans. Photograph: Ina Fassbender/Reuters

Restaurant chains [Burger King](#) and Tim Hortons plan to switch to chickens that are raised without antibiotics considered "critically important" to human medicine, their owner said on Wednesday.

Restaurant Brands International Inc, which owns both chains, said it aimed to make the change in US stores in 2017 and in [Canada](#) in 2018.

An estimated 70% of antibiotics that are important in fighting human infections and ensuring the safety of invasive procedures such as surgeries are sold for use in meat and dairy production.

Concern has been growing among scientists, public health experts, consumers and shareholders that the overuse of such drugs is contributing to rising numbers of life-threatening human infections from antibiotic-resistant "superbugs".

Restaurant Brands said: “We believe that it is important to reduce the use of antibiotics important for human medicine in order to preserve the effectiveness of antibiotics in both veterinary and human medicine.”

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that each year at least 2 million people in the US are infected with drug-resistant bacteria and that 23,000 die as a direct result.

Officials with health advocacy group [As You Sow](#) said they had been working with Restaurant Brands on its antibiotics policy for more than a year. In February, the group withdrew a shareholder proposal calling on the company to develop a stricter policy after Restaurant Brands agreed to address the issue before the end of 2016.

[Austin Wilson](#), environmental health program manager for [As You Sow](#), said the company’s new plan represented progress. Still, he said it was “disappointing, since it is weaker than the standards set in the last year or two by Tyson, McDonald’s and Wendy’s”.

McDonald’s has already removed all antibiotics important to human medicine from its US chicken supply chain, and Wendy’s said in August it would quit using chickens raised with antibiotics important to human health by 2017.

Tyson Foods, the biggest US chicken processor, has said it intends to stop using all antibiotics important to human medicine to raise its chickens in 2017.

Restaurant Brands is eliminating only those drugs that are “the most critical in human medicine” from its supply, [Wilson](#) said.

Yum Brands’ [KFC stands out as the last major chicken chain yet to make a move](#) on curbing antibiotic use. KFC has far more restaurants than any other fast-food chicken chain and is second in sales behind Chick-fil-A, which has committed to finishing its switch to chicken raised without any antibiotics by the end of 2019.

[As You Sow](#) has filed a shareholder proposal requesting that Yum phase out harmful antibiotics from its meat supply in a bid to prompt changes at KFC.

