

[Copy of Original Article]

We should worry about the things that are truly dangerous



Antibiotics in livestock is an issue that has raised concerns among some in the United States and other countries. | AP file

[Bill Mege](#)

For Sun-Times Media

July 30 8:35 a.m.

There are things that are dangerous and things that are not. It says something about human psychology, I think, that people, especially parents, seem to worry only about the things that aren't dangerous.

The non-therapeutic use of antibiotics in livestock is dangerous, yet in this country as much as 75 to 90 percent of the antibiotics we use may go for this purpose. Fifty years ago, it was found that adding antibiotics to animal feed increases the fraction of the feed that is converted to meat, resulting in more rapid weight gain and decreased time to market.

Antibiotics also allow animals to be raised in crowded, unsanitary conditions, which keeps the price of meat artificially low. Unfortunately, constant exposure to low dose antibiotics selects for drug resistant bacteria, which go on to infect people and transfer the resistance genes to other bacterial species. This is where some of the current MRSA strains came from.

Eventually, perhaps soon, many infections will be resistant to all antibiotics and we will return to the days when even the slightest wound could kill you. Despite the fact that we could stop the practice overnight, plus the half of all human antibiotic use that is inappropriate, parents and the general public seem unconcerned.

Mimics of estrogen, “xenoestrogens,” are dangerous. These are chemicals that, while intended for other purposes, act like female hormones in many animals, including humans. They cause a number of serious medical problems including precocious puberty and obesity.

Among the dozens of chemicals that act this way are the widely used herbicide atrazine, the livestock growth promoter zeranol, dioxin, and the ubiquitous plastic components bisphenol A and phthalate.

It is essential that exposure to xenoestrogens be kept as low as possible, especially in children. A female should take in no more than two or three billionths of a gram per day. Most get a whole lot more. Despite that, there are almost no parents who seem worried enough to wonder whether atrazine is being sprayed on their front lawn every summer, or how much free bisphenol A is in the plastic that lines the inside of most food and beverage cans.

So what do people worry about? Apparently, they still fret about radio waves. Despite the fact that there is zero scientific evidence they cause health problems and, because of their wavelength, few if any scientists who think they could, they’re the thing that gets people most upset. We have immersed billions of people in a continuously growing sea of radar, RFID scanners, WiFi networks, garage door openers, radio and TV broadcasts, Bluetooth, and cell phones without detectable health effects. If RF radiation caused any kind of medical problems, the world would be in big trouble, but it isn’t. When School District 203 was approached and offered \$2,000 or \$3,000 per month per site to allow cell phone towers on their property, a few parents objected because they claimed it would put their children at risk. But the RF levels under an antenna are thousands of times lower than recommended levels, and only 1 percent of what the kid would get from his own phone.

The biggest reason not to let fear decide this issue, however, is that it is school, hopefully one of the few remaining islands of evidence-based rationality in the vast contemporary ocean of lies, manufactured fear, and superstition. If schools are not going to stand up for reason and verity, what possible use are they to their students or the community? They should tell parents to stop worrying about the things that are not dangerous, and start worrying a whole lot more about the many things that are.