

Even As Superbugs Spread, No Rush To Fix Antibiotic Crisis

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Thirty years ago, when the world faced the terrifying prospect of an untreatable disease known as AIDS, big drug makers scented an opportunity and raced to develop new medicines.

Today, as the world confronts another crisis, this time one of antibiotic resistance, the industry is doing the opposite. It is cutting research in a field that offers little scope for making money.

Antibiotics have become victims of their own success. Seen as cheap, routine treatments, they are overprescribed and taken haphazardly, creating "superbugs" they can no longer fight.

These "superbugs" are growing, but are not yet widespread, so the costly research needed to combat them is not worthwhile. Medical experts say this dilemma could return medicine to an era before Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin in 1928.

Fixing the problem will need both faster approval of last-resort drugs and new ways to guarantee rewards for companies, according to both industry leaders and public health officials who have been sounding the alarm.

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