



*Press release on 2 November 2023*

## **EU ban on medicinal zinc for animals has increased the use of antimicrobial agents in piglets**

**The use of antimicrobial agents in animals has generally decreased. However, an EU ban on the use of medicinal zinc has led to an increase in the use of antimicrobial agents in piglets that are being weaned. This is one of the findings of the 2022 DANMAP report prepared by DTU National Food Institute and Statens Serum Institut.**

In 2022, Danish pig production accounted for 83% of the total veterinary use of antimicrobial agents (see figure below). From 2021 to 2022, use measured in kilograms decreased by 1.4%. However, if you look at the frequency with which pigs are treated with antimicrobial agents, the use in 2022 corresponds roughly to that of the year before.

“The fact that we don’t see a greater decrease in antimicrobial agents for pigs is related to the fact that the now piglets receive more antimicrobial agents. The EU’s ban on using medicinal zinc means that piglets are instead given neomycin to treat weaning diarrhea,” says Marianne Sandberg, Senior Researcher from DTU National Food Institute, and elaborates:

“We are keeping a close eye on the figures from DANMAP, because neomycin is a type of antimicrobial agent that the WHO categorizes as critically important for treating humans. It will be a major challenge if increasing use of neomycin in pig production leads to increased resistance among disease-causing bacteria in both animals and humans.”

### **The agricultural sector may have difficulty reaching the goal set by the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration**

The increasing use in piglets also contributes to the fact that the agricultural sector may find it difficult to reach the Danish Veterinary and Food Administration’s goal of reducing antimicrobial use in pigs by 8% for the period 2019-2023. The DANMAP report shows that the use of antimicrobial agents has been reduced by 3.6% for the period 2019-2022.

“In order to achieve a significant reduction in antimicrobial use, the health status of Danish pigs must be improved,” says Marianne Sandberg.

### **The use of antimicrobial agents in animals is declining overall**

In general, the DANMAP report shows that the use of antimicrobial agents in animals is decreasing (see figure). From 2021 to 2022, the reduction is due to lower use in pigs, cattle, and pets. In 2022, antimicrobial use was 24% lower than in 2013.

The total use of antimicrobials in animals in 2022 was approximately 86 tonnes of active substance.

### **Read more**

Since 1995, the DANMAP programme has monitored the use of antimicrobials in humans and animals in Denmark as well as the occurrence of antimicrobial resistance among bacteria from animals, humans, and food. Download the [DANMAP report](#) for 2022 from DANMAP’s website. The website also contains a [fact sheet on antimicrobial resistance](#).

Read about the development in human antimicrobial consumption in a press release on DANMAP's website:  
[Increasing antimicrobial consumption in hospitals](#)

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**Figure: The use of antimicrobial agents in animals**

