Humans sometimes receive antibiotics prescribed to treat infections. However, bacteria develop resistance to antibiotics as a natural, adaptive reaction. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can then spread from the treated patient to other persons.

Animals may be treated with antibiotics and they can therefore carry antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Vegetables may be contaminated with antibiotic-resistant bacteria from animal manure used as fertilizer. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can spread to humans through food and direct contact with animals.

Humans sometimes receive antibiotics in hospitals and then carry antibiotic-resistant bacteria. These can spread to other patients via unclean hands or contaminated objects. Patients who may be carrying antibiotic-resistant bacteria will ultimately be sent home, and can spread these resistant bacteria to other persons.

Travellers requiring hospital care while visiting a country with a high prevalence of antibiotic resistance may return with antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Even if not in contact with healthcare, travellers may carry and import resistant bacteria acquired from food or the environment during travel.