

Vegan Education in Schools

Case study of speciesism

Questioning meat - ethics, justice and the future

Years 7 to 12

Lesson 3: The health dangers of eating meat

Overview: This lesson explores the serious health risks associated with meat consumption, including heart disease, cancer, antibiotic resistance and foodborne illnesses. Students will analyse scientific research, compare meat-based diets with vegan diets and discuss how the meat industry downplays these risks. The lesson will also examine how animal agriculture contributes to antibiotic overuse and the rise of drug-resistant bacteria.

Objective: Investigate the direct link between meat consumption and major health issues and expose the risks associated with antibiotic use in animal agriculture.

Outcomes:

- Students will understand the connection between meat consumption and chronic illnesses such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes.
- Students will critically analyse the role of antibiotics in animal farming and their impact on human health.
- Students will be able to evaluate the risks of foodborne illnesses and bacterial contamination in meat products.
- Students will compare the health benefits of vegan diets to meat-based diets.

Materials:

- Videos:
 - [How Does Eating Fish, Meat And Dairy Impact Your Gut And Heart Health](#) - Joel Kahn
 - [The World Health Organization Classifies Processed Meat As A Carcinogen In The Same Class As Cigarettes](#) - The Real Truth About Health
- Articles:
 - [Eating meat 'raises risk of heart disease, diabetes and pneumonia'](#) - The Guardian
 - [The dangers of antibiotic resistance](#) - World Health Organization
 - [How red and processed meat increase cancer risk](#) - The Nutrition Source

- Case studies:
 - Countries with the highest meat consumption vs their disease rates
 - The rise of antibiotic-resistant bacteria due to antibiotic use in animal farming
 - Foodborne illness outbreaks linked to contaminated meat
- Handouts:
 - Comparison of nutritional differences between meat-based and vegan diets
 - Infographic on antibiotic resistance and animal farming

Lesson steps:

1. Introduction (10 minutes):

- Ask students: “Is meat essential for human health?”
- Discuss common misconceptions promoted by the meat industry.
- Introduce the lesson’s focus on meat consumption and health risks.

2. Chronic diseases linked to meat consumption (20 minutes):

- Show video on the link between meat and disease ([How Does Eating Fish, Meat And Dairy Impact Your Gut And Heart Health](#)).
- Discuss studies showing higher rates of heart disease, cancer and diabetes in high meat-consuming populations.
- Compare life expectancy and disease rates between meat-heavy and vegan diets.

3. Antibiotic resistance and animal farming (20 minutes):

- Present data on how 70-80% of the world’s antibiotics are given to farmed animals.
- Show WHO warnings on antibiotic overuse in animal agriculture ([The dangers of antibiotic resistance](#)).
- Discuss how drug-resistant bacteria spread from farms to humans through meat consumption and environmental contamination.

4. Foodborne illnesses and contamination (15 minutes):

- Explain how meat products are common carriers of E. coli, salmonella and other deadly pathogens.
- Compare risks of bacterial contamination in meat vs vegan foods.

5. Nutritional comparison: Meat-based diets vs vegan diets (15 minutes):

- Discuss protein myths and how vegan diets provide all essential nutrients.
- Present studies showing the benefits of whole-food vegan diets in preventing disease.
- Handout [comparison of meat-based vs vegan nutritional intake](#). - Science of food

6. Industry deception and lobbying (10 minutes):

- Discuss how the [meat industry funds research to downplay health risks](#).
- Compare industry tactics to those used by the tobacco industry in the past. **Video:** [Don't trust the meat industry?](#) - Earthling Ed
- Brainstorm how public health policies could counteract meat industry propaganda.

7. Class discussion and reflection (10 minutes):

- Ask students: “How does this information change your view on meat consumption?”
- Discuss how the public can be better informed about the health risks of meat.
- Encourage students to research and share additional studies on the topic.

Homework:

- Write a 500-word essay on the health risks of meat consumption and the benefits of a vegan diet.
- Research a recent foodborne illness outbreak linked to meat and analyse its causes and consequences.
- Find an example of meat industry-funded research and critique its claims.

Differentiation:

- Provide simplified versions of key health studies for students needing extra support.
- Offer an option to create a visual presentation instead of writing an essay.
- Encourage advanced students to investigate global health policies related to meat consumption.
- Use small group discussions for students who prefer verbal expression over written assignments.

Assessment criteria:

- Participation in discussions and ability to articulate key health concerns.
- Depth of research and analysis in homework assignments.
- Engagement with critical analysis of industry-funded research.
- Critical thinking demonstrated in class debates and presentations.