

Antibiotics: Will they work when you really need them?

Get Smart About Antibiotics Week

Monday, November 15, 2010



Did you know?

1. Antibiotic resistance is one of the world's most pressing public health threats.
2. Antibiotics are the most important tool we have to combat life-threatening bacterial diseases.
3. Increased antibiotic resistance is compromising the effectiveness of antibiotics.
4. Patients, healthcare providers, hospital administrators, and policy makers must work together to employ effective strategies for improving appropriate antibiotic use – ultimately saving lives.

Scope of the Problem

- Antibiotic resistance occurs when bacteria change in a way that reduces or eliminates the effectiveness of antibiotics.
- Infections with resistant bacteria have become more common in healthcare and community settings, and many bacteria have become resistant to more than one type or class of antibiotic.
- Antibiotics can cure bacterial infections, not viral infections. Not only does treating viruses with antibiotics not work, it increases the likelihood that you will become ill with a resistant bacterial infection. Some resistant infections can cause death.
- It is estimated that more than 50% of antibiotics are unnecessarily prescribed in the office setting for upper respiratory infections (URIs), like cough and cold illness, most of which are caused by viruses.
- Prescribing antibiotics for viral URIs is the most common misuse of these drugs. These infections will resolve on their own without antibiotics.
- In children, antibiotics are the most common cause of emergency department visits for adverse drug events.
- Children may have up to nine colds each year. Four out of 10 children who present to an outpatient provider with the common cold receive an antibiotic. Antibiotics are not indicated for a common cold.

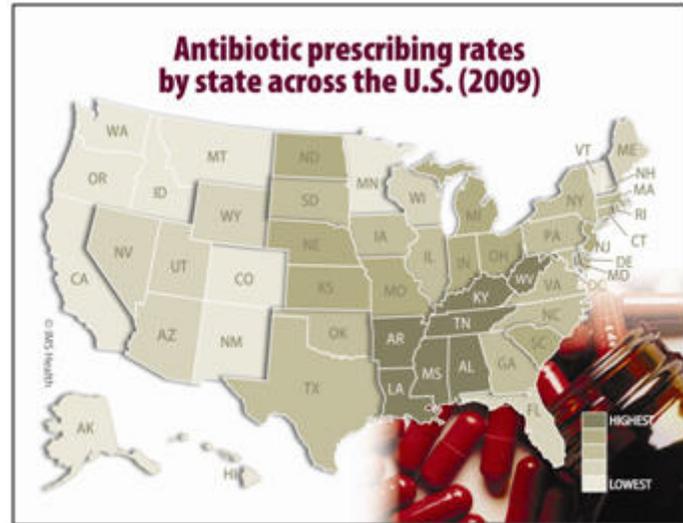
Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can quickly spread through a community, introducing a new strain of infectious disease that is more difficult to cure and more expensive to treat.



The problem is that we expect antibiotics to work for every illness, but they don't.

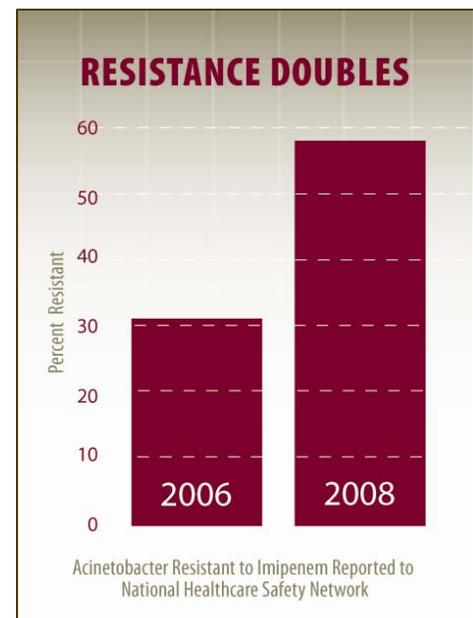
Why we must act now

- Antibiotics are a shared resource – and becoming a scarce resource.
- Appropriate use of existing antibiotics can limit the spread of antibiotic resistance, preserving antibiotics for the future.
- Antibiotic resistance is not just a problem for the person with the infection. Some resistant bacteria have the potential to spread to others – promoting antibiotic-resistant infections.



The public can help

- Just because an antibiotic is not prescribed doesn't mean you aren't sick. Ask what else can be done to help relieve symptoms and don't request an antibiotic when a healthcare provider determines one is not appropriate.
- Only take antibiotics for a bacterial infection, such as strep throat, or as your doctor prescribes.
- Taking antibiotics for a viral infection will not cure the infection, protect other individuals from catching the illness, or help you feel better.
- Take the antibiotic exactly as the doctor prescribes. Do not skip doses. Complete the prescribed course of treatment, even if you start feeling better.
- Only take antibiotics prescribed for you; don't share or use leftover antibiotics. Antibiotics treat specific types of infections. Taking the wrong medicine may delay correct treatment and allow bacteria to multiply.
- Don't save antibiotics for the next illness. Discard any leftover medication once the prescribed course of treatment is completed.
- Prevent infections through good hand hygiene and getting recommended vaccines.



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

For more information, please contact Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
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