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CDC and the Center for Disease Dynamics, Economics and Policy have joined forces with numerous national health organizations to present a unified policy statement focused on the critical issue of antibiotic resistance. As representatives from a range of fields concerned with human health, we jointly recognize our collective responsibility to protect the effectiveness of all antibiotics – those we have today, and those yet to be developed.

The threat of untreatable infections is real. Although previously unthinkable, the day when antibiotics don't work is upon us. We are already seeing germs that are stronger than any antibiotics we have to treat them.

Today, infections with antibiotic-resistant bacteria have become increasingly common in healthcare and community settings. Many bacteria are now resistant to more than one type or class of antibiotic. This is a scary situation for patients and healthcare providers alike.

We're finding that widespread overuse -- as well as inappropriate use -- of antibiotics is fueling antibiotic resistance. Additionally, the overuse of antibiotics is increasing problems faced by our patients, such as drug side effects, allergic reactions, diarrheal infections caused by Clostridium difficile, or even death. Before prescribing antibiotics, we must take a moment to ask, 'Are these really necessary?' and think through the possible consequences of our actions.

Of the patients receiving antibiotics, half will receive unnecessary or inappropriate therapy. CDC is recommending that healthcare providers consider taking an 'antibiotic timeout' when a patient's culture results come back in 24 to 48 hours. This is the time to stop and assess the use of antibiotics. In order to avoid promoting the development of resistance among bacteria and unnecessary antibiotic exposure, healthcare providers should prescribe antibiotics only when they are absolutely necessary, give them at the right dose and only for as long as they are needed.

Antibiotic resistance is a growing problem in our nation's nursing homes. The reality is that up to 70 percent of long-term care facilities' residents receive an antibiotic every year, and 27,000 nursing home residents are fighting antibiotic-resistant infections. In nursing homes today, antibiotic resistance means increased risk of hospitalization for residents, as well as increased cost of treatments and an increased risk of death. It is time to reassess how we are using antibiotics to treat the elderly.

Can you imagine your antibiotic making you sick? During this year's Get Smart About Antibiotics Week, we're encouraging everyone to take a moment and learn more about antibiotics -- when they can help and when they can hurt. We invite you to visit w-w-w-dot-c-d-c-dot-gov-slash-get-smart.