

# UniversityHealthServices

We heal. We educate. We care.

## ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE

**WARNING:** *Unnecessary antibiotics CAN be harmful!*

### **You Do Not Need Antibiotics to Fight a Cold or the Flu**

When you are sick, your illness may be caused by either bacteria or viruses. Illnesses caused by *viruses*, like colds or the flu, will not be helped at all by antibiotics. Illnesses caused by *bacteria*, like strep throat, can be treated with antibiotics. Antibiotics kill bacteria, not viruses.

### **Taking Antibiotics When You Do Not Need Them Can Cause Antibiotics Not to Work When You Do Need Them**

Antibiotics kill bacteria. Some bacteria can defend themselves against antibiotics. These bacteria are called antibiotic resistant. Infection with antibiotic-resistant bacteria may be more difficult to treat and may spread to friends and family.

Some infections, such as strep throat, are best treated with antibiotics. However, taking antibiotics when you don't need them, such as for a cold or the flu, can increase your risk of getting a resistant infection.

"I need an antibiotic so I can get back to work quickly." If you have a cold or the flu, antibiotics will not help you feel better faster or keep the illness from spreading. The infection will be less likely to spread to others if you avoid close contact and wash your hands frequently.

"But in the past I've taken antibiotics for similar colds and flu and haven't gotten a resistant infection." Antibiotic resistance is a new threat to your health. It is now important to use antibiotics only when they are needed. Your doctor will ask you questions and examine you to find the cause of your illness, then give you the proper care.

When used correctly, antibiotics are useful and important medicines. Work with your doctor to use antibiotics only when they are needed.

### **Myths vs: Facts: Antibiotic Resistance**

Myth: Antibiotics help all infections.

Fact: Antibiotics only help bacterial infections. They do not help infections caused by a virus.

Myth: Antibiotics can usually help cure bronchitis, chest colds, upper respiratory infections, and common colds.

Fact: More than 90% of all bronchitis, colds, upper respiratory infections and chest colds are caused by viruses.

Myth: I need an antibiotic to "nip" this infection in the bud.

Fact: Antibiotics have no effect on viral infections.

Myth: My cold will become a sinus infection if I don't take an antibiotic.

Fact: Only 2% of colds become complicated by a bacterial sinusitis.

Myth: My cough will not last as long if I take an antibiotic for my bronchitis/chest cold.

Fact: The cough associated with bronchitis/chest cold lasts 2 to 4 weeks with or without an antibiotic.

Myth: Green or yellow mucous indicates a bacterial infection and a need for an antibiotic.

Fact: Green or yellow mucous does not indicate a bacterial infection or a need for an antibiotic.

Taking antibiotics when you do NOT need them can prevent antibiotics from working when you DO need them.

At University Health Services, our goal is to use antibiotics wisely while still treating every person as an individual. If you have questions about antibiotics, discuss them with your clinician.

**Test Results and Advice Nurse**

Please call the nurse for test results and advice: 863-4463

**Appointments**

Appointments can be made in person or by phone. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please call and cancel. Otherwise you will be charged for the visit.

To schedule or cancel appointments, call: 863-0774

**For more information about health care issues, visit the UHS Web site at [www.sa.psu.edu/uhs](http://www.sa.psu.edu/uhs)**

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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