

Antibiotics are not always the answer

What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics are strong medicines that can stop some infections and save lives. But, antibiotics only work against certain infections - those caused by bacteria. Antibiotics can cause more harm than good when they are not used properly.

- Antibiotics do **not** work against infections caused by viruses.
- Viruses cause common colds and most coughs and sore throats. Antibiotics will not cure these infections.

What are antibiotic-resistant bacteria?

When bacteria are killed by an antibiotic, they are said to be “sensitive” to that antibiotic. When bacteria cannot be killed by an antibiotic, they are said to be “resistant” to that antibiotic. Each time you or your child takes an antibiotic, sensitive bacteria are killed. At the same time, resistant bacteria may be left to grow and multiply.

- Resistant strains of bacteria have increased greatly in Colorado and throughout the United States.
- One major cause of antibiotic-resistant bacteria is the use of antibiotics when they are not necessary.
- The more antibiotics you or your child use, the more likely you or your child will become infected with an antibiotic-resistant strain of bacteria.
- Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can spread to family members and others in the community.
- Illnesses caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria are harder to treat. They may require hospitalization and may even be life-threatening.

When do you or your child need antibiotics?

- This question is best answered by your doctor or health professional.
- Colds normally last from a few days up to 2 to 3 weeks. In most cases they get better on their own.
- Yellow or green mucus from the nose does **not** mean you or your child needs an antibiotic.
- Most coughs (even bronchitis) are **not** helped by antibiotics.
- Most sore throats (except strep throat) are **not** helped by antibiotics.
- Antibiotics do not prevent a cold or cough from getting worse or leading to pneumonia.

Call your child's doctor or health professional:

- When your child is less than 3 months old and has a fever or is acting sick.
- When your child has difficulty breathing or swallowing.
- When your child has a cough for more than 10 to 14 days **and** is not getting better.
- When your child has yellow or green mucous from the nose for more than 10 to 14 days **and** is not getting better.
- When your child has a fever and a rash.
- When your child has a fever and ear pain.

Call your doctor or health professional:

- When you have a cough that lasts 3 weeks or longer.
- When you have a cough producing blood.
- When you feel short of breath.
- When you have chest pain, tightness, or wheezing.
- When you have difficulty swallowing.
- When you feel sick and have a chronic medical condition such as diabetes, heart disease, or lung disease.

What you can do to fight antibiotic resistance:

- **Remember**, most coughs and colds are **not** helped by antibiotics.
- **Do not** expect or ask your doctor or health professional to prescribe antibiotics for coughs and colds.
- If your doctor or health professional does prescribe an antibiotic, take **all** the medicine as directed, even after you feel better.
- Never share antibiotics with someone else.
- Throw away old, unused antibiotics from past illnesses.
- **Remember**, unnecessary use of antibiotics causes much more harm than good.

This information provides a general overview on antibiotic resistance and may not apply to everyone. If you have a chronic medical condition or are concerned about an illness, talk with your doctor or health professional to see if this information applies to you.

For more information, visit www.GetSmartColorado.com.



Colorado Department
of Public Health
and Environment