

## **Antibiotic Resistance: A Growing Health Threat We Can't Afford to Ignore**

Can you imagine a time when antibiotics used today are no longer effective? Seems far-fetched, right? It's actually not. In fact, experts believe that today's antibiotics might not work 10 to 20 years from now.

How could this happen? The answer is antibiotic resistance, a growing health problem that puts all of us at risk for diseases that were once easily cured by antibiotics.

### **What is Antibiotic Resistance?**

Antibiotic resistance occurs when antibiotics are used unnecessarily or incorrectly, and some bacteria become resistant to those drugs. In other words, the drugs don't work as well to stop or kill the bacteria. This happens because each time we take antibiotics, sensitive bacteria are killed, but resistant ones are sometimes left to grow and multiply. With more resistant bacteria, antibiotics become less effective.

### **Why Should I Be Concerned?**

Many people think antibiotic resistance is a problem that doesn't affect them. But antibiotic resistance affects us all. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria are difficult to treat and can quickly spread to family members, coworkers, schoolmates and entire communities. If you or someone you know becomes infected with antibiotic-resistant bacteria, it could result in a longer lasting illness, more doctor visits and the need for stronger, more expensive antibiotics that may have more side effects. Severe cases could result in hospitalization and even death.

Perhaps you remember when comedian and former talk-show host Rosie O'Donnell became seriously ill a few years ago. Her illness started out as a simple cut on her finger, but it turned into a life-threatening, antibiotic-resistant infection. Rosie survived, but not everyone who develops an antibiotic-resistant infection is as lucky. In fact, nearly 50 Americans die every day from infections that can no longer be cured by antibiotics.

### **What Can I Do About It?**

The single-most important thing you can do to protect yourself and your family from antibiotic resistance is **to use antibiotics properly**. To do this, it's important to understand the basic facts. Antibiotics kill bacteria, not viruses. Illnesses such as a cold, the flu, most sore throats and most cases of bronchitis are caused by viruses, so antibiotics won't cure them and should not be used.

This may be surprising news for some people. Many people have used antibiotics for these types of illnesses in the past. While it may seem that the antibiotic has worked, in such cases people get better on their own as the illness naturally runs its course.

It's common to think of antibiotics as wonder drugs that cure everything. People who are ill may pressure their doctor for an antibiotic or use medication left over from a previous illness. In fact, taking an antibiotic for a virus can do more harm than good: It will never cure the illness and it increases the risk of developing a resistant infection in the future.

To help stop the spread of antibiotic resistance, expert physicians, scientists and healthcare organizations like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Council for Affordable Quality Healthcare (CAQH) are urging consumers to talk to their doctors about the proper use of antibiotics.

CAQH, in partnership with the CDC and local health plans have launched a nationwide educational campaign called *Save Antibiotic Strength<sup>SM</sup> (SAS)*.

### **Tips for Using Antibiotics Wisely**

The SAS campaign offers simple but important steps that you can take to protect yourself and your family from antibiotic-resistant infections including:

- Use antibiotics only when your healthcare provider prescribes them.
- Don't ask your doctor to prescribe antibiotics to treat symptoms of a cold, flu or other viral illnesses.
- When you do need an antibiotic, be sure to take all of the medication prescribed. Even if you are feeling better before taking the full dose, you may still have infectious bacteria in your body that could make you sick again. Never save leftovers for future use.
- Never take antibiotics prescribed for someone else or give one child antibiotics prescribed for another.

By following these guidelines you can help protect yourself and your loved ones from the threat of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. **For more information** about the proper use of antibiotics visit [www.caqh.org/antibioticsinfo](http://www.caqh.org/antibioticsinfo) or [www.cdc.gov/getsmart](http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart).

For medical and dental plan participants, GuideStone's Well Informed resources include tools to help you better understand your prescriptions, find alternative treatments and get the latest drug information available. For more information, go to [www.GuideStoneInsurance.org](http://www.GuideStoneInsurance.org) and choose the "Well informed" link.