

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
November 14, 2016

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Sniffle. Snort. Sneeze. No Antibiotics Please.

Bismarck, N.D.—In conjunction with Get Smart About Antibiotics Week, November 14-20, 2016, the North Dakota Department of Health (NDDoH) is spreading the message that “antibiotics aren’t always the answer,” says Faye Salzer, HAI Activities Coordinator.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the NDDoH want to remind everyone this cold and flu season: antibiotics don’t work on viruses—never have, never will! “This isn’t new news. It’s a long-documented medical fact. Antibiotics can only treat illnesses caused by bacteria. Colds, the flu, most sore throats, bronchitis, and many sinus and ear infections are caused by viruses, not bacteria,” states Salzer.

If you or your child has a viral infection, antibiotics won’t help anyone feel better or get well sooner. In fact, they can even be harmful. Taking antibiotics when they are not needed is fueling an increase in drug-resistant bacteria, which cause infections that are more difficult, and sometimes even impossible, to cure. Almost all types of bacteria have become less responsive to antibiotic treatment. These “superbugs” can quickly spread to family members, schoolmates, and coworkers, and threaten our communities with illnesses that were once easily treatable. Antibiotic resistance is a growing problem, and the main cause of this problem is the misuse of antibiotics. CDC estimates that more than two million antibiotic resistant infections occur annually in the United States.

“We need to be better stewards of our antibiotics,” said Salzer. “This can be accomplished by making sure you take antibiotics only when they are needed and used as they should. When diagnosed with a viral illness, ask your doctor what you can do to feel more comfortable. Your provider may suggest you drink plenty of fluids, get a lot of rest, use over-the-counter medications as directed, use a cool mist humidifier, or gargle with salt water. Do not ask or pressure your provider for antibiotics.”

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Antibiotics can also lead to side effects, such as diarrhea or an upset stomach. Some side effects can be quite serious, or even life-threatening. An example is *Clostridium difficile* (*C. difficile* or *C. diff*) infections – these are bacterial infections that cause severe diarrhea. In the past, most *C. difficile* infections were connected to a recent hospital stay. Studies show that children in the general community – without a recent hospital stay – account for as many as seven out of 10 pediatric *C. difficile* infections. Many children who got sick with *C. difficile* had recently taken a course of antibiotics for a respiratory infection — infections that are usually caused by viruses and therefore not even helped by the antibiotics.

The CDC Get Smart program focuses on common illnesses that account for most of the antibiotic prescriptions written for children and adults in doctors’ offices and other outpatient settings. The table below shows when antibiotics are necessary for common illnesses.

Antibiotics only treat bacterial infections. Viral illnesses cannot be treated with antibiotics. When an antibiotic is not prescribed, ask your healthcare professional for tips on how to relieve symptoms and feel better.

| Illness | Usual Cause | | Antibiotic Needed |
|--|-------------|----------|-------------------|
| | Viruses | Bacteria | |
| Cold/Runny Nose | ✓ | | NO |
| Bronchitis/Chest Cold (in otherwise healthy children and adults) | ✓ | | NO |
| Whooping Cough | | ✓ | Yes |
| Flu | ✓ | | NO |
| Strep Throat | | ✓ | Yes |
| Sore Throat (except strep) | ✓ | | NO |
| Fluid in the Middle Ear (otitis media with effusion) | ✓ | | NO |
| Urinary Tract Infection | | ✓ | Yes |

Source: www.cdc.gov/getsmart/community/about/should-know.html

For more information, contact Faye Salzer, North Dakota Department of Health, at 701.328.2378 or visit www.cdc.gov/getsmart/.

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