



701 Heartland trail, Madison, WI 53717
608.827.9200, fax 608.827.9200
jeanner@pswi.org www.pswi.org

Contact: Jeanne Rosen
608-827-9200

ANTIBIOTIC-RESISTANT BACTERIA FACT SHEET

- Two main types of germs—bacteria and viruses, cause infections. Bacterial infections can be cured by antibiotics—viral infections cannot.
- Viral infections cause most coughs, sore throats and all colds. People recover from viral infections when the illness has run its course.
- Antibiotics are among the most powerful and important medicines known. Each time antibiotics are taken, sensitive bacteria are killed, but resistant ones may be left to grow and multiply. Some resistant strains of bacteria are already untreatable.
- Nearly one-fourth of Americans misuse antibiotics. Inappropriate uses can result from incorrect diagnosis of infections, unnecessary prescriptions for strong, broad-spectrum antibiotics, repeated and improper use of antibiotics, and pressure placed upon physicians by patients to provide treatment.
- Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can be spread to others in the family, community, and hospital.
- Some antibiotic-resistant bacteria can be treated with more powerful medicines, which may need to be given by vein (IV) in the hospital.
- At present, most strains of antibiotic-resistant bacteria originate and are contracted from hospital intensive care units (ICUs). Therefore, untreatable and hard-to-treat bacteria are much more common in hospitals than in the community at large.
- Many hospitals have systems to track the spread of antibiotic-resistant bacteria and to provide information to health-system pharmacists and physicians about the use and effectiveness of antibiotics.
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), current costs related to treatment of antibiotic-resistant bacteria are estimated to be over \$4 billion annually.
- Deciding whether or not antibiotics are needed:
 - Ear infections:** There are several types; most need antibiotics, but some do not.
 - Sinus infections:** Antibiotics are needed for some long-lasting or severe cases.
 - Cough or bronchitis:** Antibiotics are rarely needed for bronchitis.
 - Sore throat:** Most cases are caused by viruses. Only one main kind, “strep throat,” requires antibiotics. This kind must be diagnosed by a laboratory test.
 - Colds:** Antibiotics have no effect on colds.

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- Viral infections may sometimes lead to bacterial infections. However, treating viral infections with antibiotics to prevent bacterial infections does not work.
- Patients most susceptible to antibiotic-resistant bacteria include premature infants, children, the elderly, burn victims, bone marrow transplant patients, and those with weakened immune systems such as AIDS patients and leukemia patients.
- Vaccinations that offer protection from infection are available. This is particularly vital for children, the elderly, and those with serious health conditions. Pharmacists and doctors can provide information on such vaccinations.
- For patients undergoing certain operations, appropriate use of antibiotics can protect them from infection before and after surgery.

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The Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin (PSW) is a 1,800 member professional association that represents pharmacy practitioners in all aspects of pharmacy, including hospitals, chain pharmacies, independent pharmacies, long-term care facilities, home care and other components of health care. PSW provides leadership in education, advocacy and innovative services which optimize patient care through the utilization and support of rational drug therapy as a primary resource in a changing health care environment.