RESOURCE SHEET

Canadian Child Care Federation

#53

Not all Bugs are Created Equal: Use Antibiotics Wisely

Your child has a bug?

Your child feels really, really sick and you are really, really frightened. You think antibiotics will make her feel better. Maybe — maybe not. Why?

- *Antibiotics kill bacteria but do not kill viruses.*
- In children, 90 per cent of colds and flus — and the coughs, sore throats, aches and pains that go with them — are caused by viruses. *Antibiotics won't help.*

Antibiotics are medicines that doctors use to cure infections caused by *bacteria*. Because antibiotics are not always used correctly, bacteria are becoming more resistant to antibiotic treatment — and that is a problem for all of us.

Germs are in the air you breathe and on everything you touch. The two most common types of germs are bacteria and viruses. Strep throat and meningitis are examples of infections caused by bacteria. Colds and flus are examples of infection caused by viruses. Sometimes a fever results when germs enter the body. Having a fever means the body is fighting to kill the viruses or the bacteria.

How do bacteria become resistant?

Bacteria are smart. They constantly evolve and adapt to their environment. Widespread use of antibiotics has cured sickness caused by some bacteria, but new varieties of bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics are evolving.

Antibiotics quickly kill weak bacteria, but the stronger, more resistant bacteria survive and multiply. These resistant bacteria can cause infections that are more difficult to

treat. The level of medicine in the body needs to remain steadily high and go on for enough days to kill the most resistant bacteria.

Antibiotics that are incorrectly prescribed for colds actually *encourage* antibiotic resistance among normal bacteria living in the intestinal tract.

Correct use of antibiotics

- antibiotics are used only for *bacterial* infections
- each dose of medicine is given at the times your doctor instructed
- all the doses of medicine are finished

Consulting a doctor

On average, a child will have more than six colds a year. You know when your child is sick. But knowing when to visit the doctor can be tricky. Consult the child's doctor when:

- illness lasts longer than a week
- high fever occurs – 38.5°C or higher rectal temperature; 38°C or higher oral temperature. If the child is younger than six months and has a fever, consult your doctor.
- sinus pain, earache or toothache develops
- a cough or other symptom suddenly gets worse

Follow your doctor's advice

The doctor and the parent are a team — work together on the right solution for your child. If the child's illness has been diagnosed as a virus infection, he or she will get better without antibiotics.

An ordinary cold or flu virus will run its course in about a week. Rest and drink lots of clear fluids, like water or juice. Flu and cold remedies will help make the child feel better and may help prevent other problems such as ear infections.

If your doctor diagnoses a bacterial infection and prescribes an antibiotic, follow *all* instructions provided by your doctor and your pharmacist. You may have to wake your child to give a dose of medicine. Even though she probably will feel better after a couple of days, *finish all the medication*.

Help solve the problem

- talk to your doctor about treatment choices
- give (and take) antibiotic prescriptions according to the doctor's instructions
- finish the prescribed course of antibiotic treatment
- never use antibiotics prescribed for someone else

Proper antibiotic use helps to ensure that the next time someone needs an antibiotic, the treatment will work.

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