

PREVENTING UNNECESSARY ANTIBIOTIC USE

Antibiotics are strong medicines that can kill bacteria; however, they have no impact on viral infections.

VIRAL INFECTIONS

Viruses cause most infections in children, including:

- All colds
- All croup
- 99% of coughs
- 95% of fevers
- 90% of sore throats
- 99% of diarrhea and vomiting

BACTERIAL INFECTIONS

Bacterial infections are much less common than viral infections. They include:

- Most ear infections
- Most sinus infections
- 10% of sore throats (i.e. Strep)
- Whooping cough (Pertussis)
- Most pneumonias

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT SYMPTOMS

These symptoms are sometimes misused as signs of a bacterial infection:

- Yellow nasal discharge - this is more likely to be a normal part of the recovery from a cold than a clue to a sinus infection
- High fevers - can be caused by both viruses and bacteria

REASONS NOT TO OVERUSE ANTIBIOTICS

Following a cold, about 10% of children will develop an ear infection and 1% will develop a sinus infection. Giving antibiotics to the other 89% who don't need them can cause the bacteria to become more resistant and your child to have unnecessary side effects.

BACTERIAL RESISTANCE: When bacteria become resistant to an antibiotic, that medicine can no longer kill that type of bacteria. This makes future treatment of bacterial infections more difficult. Many bacteria are now resistant to antibiotics that used to control them.

SIDE EFFECTS: All antibiotics have possible side effects, including diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, or a rash. The diarrhea is often caused because the antibiotic has caused your child to lose some healthy intestinal bacteria. If your child gets a rash, your provider must determine if the rash is an allergic reaction to the drug or if it's an unrelated viral rash; because it's difficult to be sure, your child may be considered allergic to a family of antibiotics when he really isn't.

IN SUMMARY

- If your child has a viral illness, an antibiotic will not shorten the course of the fever or help the symptoms. Antibiotics will not get your child back to school or you back to work sooner.
- Antibiotics should be used for ear infections, sinus infections, Strep throat, and other bacterial infections. Otherwise, treat your child's symptoms with over-the-counter medicines or home remedies.
- Fortunately, your child's normal antibodies, once produced, can kill viruses.
- Call your healthcare provider if your child develops any new signs that suggest a bacterial infection.