



## A guide to...

# Antibiotic Resistance

## *Patient Information*

Children's Emergency Department (CED)  
Watford General Hospital



### **What is antimicrobial resistance? (AMR)**

Antimicrobial resistance happens when germs like bacteria or fungi no longer respond to the drugs designed to kill them. That means that these germs are not killed and can therefore continue to grow. It does not mean that our body is resistant to antibiotics or antifungals, it means that the germs are resistant to them.

This is a naturally occurring process; bacterial and fungi are constantly finding new ways to avoid the effects of the antibiotics and antifungal drugs used to treat the infections that they cause.

### **So if it's a natural process, why is this a problem?**

Infections caused by antimicrobial resistant germs are difficult, and sometimes impossible, to treat. In many cases, antimicrobial resistant infections require extended hospital stays, additional follow up doctor visits, and costly and toxic alternatives. In some cases, infections simply do not respond to any treatment.

### **How can taking antibiotics contribute to antimicrobial resistance?**

Anytime antibiotics are used, they can contribute to antimicrobial resistance. This is because increases in antimicrobial resistance are driven by a combination of germs exposure to antibiotics, the spread of those germs and their mechanisms of resistance. When antibiotics are needed, the benefits usually outweigh the risks of antimicrobial resistance. However, too many antibiotics are being used unnecessarily and misused, which threatens the usefulness of these important drugs.

### **Why should I care?**

Antimicrobial resistance can affect any person, at any stage of life. People receiving health care or those with weakened immune systems are often at higher risk for getting an infection. Antimicrobial resistance jeopardises advancements in modern health care that we have come to rely on, such as joint replacements, organ transplants and cancer therapy. These carry significant infection risk and won't be available to patients if we cannot treat those infections.

## How can I improve antibiotic use?

Taking antibiotics only when they are needed is an important way you can protect yourself and your family from antimicrobial resistance. Talk to your clinician about the best treatment if you are sick. Do not pressure them to prescribe an antibiotic.

When antibiotics aren't needed, they won't help you, and their side effects could still cause harm. Ask your clinician or pharmacist about steps you can take to feel better when an antibiotic isn't needed.

If your clinician decides an antibiotic is the best treatment when you are sick:

- Take the medication exactly as your doctor tells you.
- Do not share your medication with others.
- Do not save them for later. Talk to your pharmacist about safely discarding leftover medicines.
- Do not take antibiotics prescribed for someone else. This may delay the best treatment for you, make you even sicker, or cause side effects.

Talk with your clinician and pharmacist if you have any questions about your antibiotics prescribed to you.

**Everyone has a role to play in reducing antibiotic use.  
Appropriate antibiotic use helps fight antimicrobial resistance  
and thus ensures these lifesaving drugs will be available  
for future generations.**

If you need this leaflet in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01923 217 187** or email **[westherts.pals@nhs.uk](mailto:westherts.pals@nhs.uk)**



Author	Sian Edwards
Department	Children's Emergency Department
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