

Fact sheet

No action today,
no cure tomorrow



Action 7:

Educate consumers about antibiotic use

Educating consumers* about safe and appropriate use of medicines is an important aspect of prescribing and using any medicine. Antibiotics differ from other medicines in that their use in one person can influence their future effects in others.¹ Educating consumers about the role they can play in reducing the emergence, spread and control of antibiotic resistance is one strategy that can be used to safeguard the use of antibiotics and ensure they will continue to work in the future. Consumers should be encouraged to help tackle the problem of antibiotic resistance through education about the action they can take, and discussion with clinicians.

Studies report that consumers frequently believe viral infections such as the common cold and flu can be treated with antibiotics and expect, or even demand prescriptions for antibiotics. This expectation and demand for antibiotic therapy is considered to be one of the drivers of antibiotic resistance.² Educating consumers that colds and flu are caused by viruses and will not respond to antibiotics is also fundamental in changing the patterns of antibiotic use, and the development and spread of antimicrobial resistance.²⁻⁴

When antibiotics are prescribed for consumers, clinicians should educate consumers and their families or carers about the reasons why an antibiotic has been prescribed, the dose and time it should be taken, the expected duration of therapy, likely side effects that can occur and to report any adverse effects or concerns to a clinician. Consumer Medicine Information leaflets should be used to help convey this information.

Clinicians can also look for opportunities to educate consumers about taking antibiotics responsibly. Antibiotics are important life saving medicines, so it is important that when they are prescribed, consumers know how to use them appropriately. This includes explaining: the differences between bacteria and viruses and why viruses do not respond to antibiotics, what antibiotic resistance is, what antibiotic allergies mean, why the antibiotic is needed, how and when antibiotics should be taken, how long they should be taken for, not to share antibiotics with other people, or take antibiotics left over from a previous illness. Consumers should be aware that taking antibiotics inappropriately or when they are not needed, may mean that the antibiotic will not work in the future when it is needed. This education should be provided during hospitalisation, as well as on discharge should the patient be going home on antibiotics. NPS MedicineWise has a number of useful resources that may assist clinicians with these discussions (See below).

Key points:

- Educate consumers about the actions they can take to help tackle antibiotic resistance
- Ensure consumers know how to use antibiotics correctly
- Use the available tools and resources to educate consumers

* Consumers includes patients and their carers

Useful resources

Clinicians may find the following resources to be useful when educating patients about appropriate antibiotic use:

- **Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets:** These are available for all prescription medicines available in Australia and should be offered each time an antibiotic is dispensed by the pharmacist. Consumers can access CMI via the NPS MedicineWise website www.nps.org.au/medicines
- NPS MedicineWise also provides other information on antibiotic medicines for consumers www.nps.org.au/antibiotic-medicines as well as information on antibiotic resistance www.nps.org.au/antibiotic-resistance
- **NPS Medicines Line (1300 MEDICINE):** Medicines Line is a telephone service operated by NPS MedicineWise, where consumers can ask questions and be given advice about the appropriate use of their prescription, over-the-counter and complementary medicines www.nps.org.au/medicines-line
- **Antibiotics reminder iPhone app:** developed by NPS MedicineWise to help consumers remember to take their antibiotics on time www.nps.org.au/antibiotics-reminder

References and further reading

1. Antibiotic Expert Group. *Therapeutic Guidelines: Antibiotic*. Version 14. Melbourne. Therapeutic Guidelines Ltd; 2010
2. Davey P, Pagliari C, Hayes A. The patient's role in the spread and control of bacterial resistance to antibiotics. *Clinical Microbiology and Infection* 2002;8(Supp 2):43-68
3. Consumers Health Forum of Australia. *Community Quality Use of Medicines and Diagnostics Project – Consumer and General Practice Use of Antibiotics: A Consumer Information and Discussion Paper*. 2011
4. Steiner E, Saddler L, Fagan L. Promoting appropriate antibiotic use: teaching doctors, teaching patients. *Californian Journal of Health Promotion* 2004;2(Special Issue):22-30

This document is intended for use by health professionals. It has been created from information contained in *Antimicrobial Stewardship in Australian Hospitals 2011* and reviewed by clinical experts. Reasonable care has been taken to ensure this information is accurate at the date of creation. This fact sheet is intended to be used in its original version. It can be downloaded from the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care web page www.safetyandquality.gov.au/aaw2013

“No action today, no cure tomorrow” is adopted from the WHO World Health Day 2011.