

AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

Media release Wednesday 9 November 2016



Australian Government

Department of Health



Australian Government

Department of Agriculture
and Water Resources



Antibiotic Awareness Week 2016: tackling a global health problem

The urgent need to tackle growing antibiotic resistance is the focus of an awareness campaign backed by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) in partnership with other leading health and livestock organisations and agencies.

Antibiotic Awareness Week in Australia is part of a global push endorsed by the World Health Organization (WHO) to encourage people to handle antibiotics with care to slow the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

The collaborative “One Health” approach in Australia – involving the Commission, the Australian Government Department of Health, the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, NPS MedicineWise and the Australian Veterinary Association – aims to raise awareness of the importance of appropriate prescribing and use of antibiotics in hospital, at the vet, on the farm, and in the community.

The Commission’s Senior Consultant, Professor John Turnidge, said: “Antibiotic Awareness Week is a prime opportunity to raise awareness of the threat posed by antibiotic resistance. The Commission’s *Antimicrobial Use and Resistance in Australia (AURA) 2016: First Australian report on antimicrobial use and resistance in human health* provides the most comprehensive picture of antimicrobial resistance, antimicrobial use and appropriateness of prescribing in Australia to date.

“The *AURA 2016* report represents a milestone resource, exploring patterns in prescribing and use of antibiotics which we can use to better understand specific, emerging threats and focus efforts to mitigate the risk of antimicrobial resistance across Australia. Similarly, the Commission’s first *Australian Atlas of Healthcare Variation* presents a clear picture of substantial variation in healthcare use across Australia, including in antibiotic prescribing. We can use this information to look at why this variation exists, and identify priorities for improvement where needed,” Professor Turnidge said.

The Australian Government Chief Medical Officer, Professor Brendan Murphy, said: “Antimicrobial resistance is an important issue which

the Australian Government takes very seriously. The Department of Health is continuing to work closely with the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources to implement the National Antimicrobial Resistance Strategy. Australia is also actively contributing to the global response to antimicrobial resistance and is leading the way regionally. Antibiotic Awareness Week is an excellent opportunity to continue to raise awareness about antimicrobial resistance in Australia and in our region.”

Australia’s Chief Veterinary Officer, Dr Mark Schipp, said the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources undertook antimicrobial resistance surveillance in Australian livestock and aquatic animal sectors to complement this work and to support the World Organisation for Animal Health’s initiatives towards mitigating antimicrobial resistance.

“The Australian agriculture sector is doing its part to help manage antibiotic resistance. While antimicrobials have a variety of uses in agriculture and are regarded as important for animal health, welfare, biosecurity and production, Australia has one of the most conservative approaches to the use of antimicrobials in livestock production in the world. For example, fluoroquinolones have not been registered for use in food-producing animals,” Dr Schipp said.

Dr Robert Johnson, President of the Australian Veterinary Association, said: “We know that we need to monitor the use of antibiotics in animals in order to tackle antibiotic resistance effectively. Antibiotic Awareness Week is a great opportunity for all of those who use antibiotics to work together on this global problem.”

“Antibiotics are a precious resource that help to make life better for people and animals. We need to help preserve them for as long as possible,” Dr Johnson said.

NPS MedicineWise Chief Executive Officer Dr Lynn Weekes said the reality was that antibiotics were already losing their power, but everyone could be part of the solution.

“Antibiotic resistance is a serious health issue already present in our community, and the overuse of antibiotics is leading to antibiotic-resistant infections – but there are simple actions you can do to help stop the spread, such as not sharing antibiotics or using leftover antibiotics from another illness,” Dr Weekes said.

“This Antibiotic Awareness Week, NPS MedicineWise is urging everyone to remember that antibiotics can’t cure viral infections like colds or flu. Only take antibiotics when recommended by your doctor, and when antibiotics are required, it’s important to take them exactly as prescribed.

“Hand hygiene is also crucial, and good basic hand washing can help to reduce the spread of bacteria that can cause infections.”

The Commission’s Antibiotic Awareness Week campaign activities are supported by the Australasian Society for Infectious Diseases, the Australian Society of Antimicrobials, the Australasian College for Infection Prevention and Control and the Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia.

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About the Commission

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) is an Australian Government agency that leads and coordinates national improvements in the safety and quality of health care based on the best available evidence. By working in partnership with patients, consumers, clinicians, managers, policy makers and health care organisations, our aim is to achieve a sustainable, safe and high-quality health system. As a result of its work, the Commission has an ongoing program of significant national activity with outcomes that are demonstrating direct patient benefit as well as creating essential underpinnings for ongoing improvement. The Commission aims to use its role as the national body for safety and quality in health care in Australia to ensure that the health system is better informed, supported and organised to deliver safe and high-quality care.

About NPS MedicineWise

Independent, evidence-based and not-for-profit, NPS MedicineWise enables better decisions about medicines and medical tests. We receive funding from the Australian Government Department of Health. This year represents the fifth year of our ongoing campaign to reduce antibiotic resistance and educate Australians about the steps they can take to preserve the miracle of antibiotics. This Antibiotic Awareness Week we encourage health professionals and community groups to get involved by downloading our campaign toolkit at www.nps.org.au/aaw2016.

Notes to Editors

The Commission has undertaken a number of actions to ensure antibiotics are being used appropriately in Australia, including the introduction of an Antimicrobial Stewardship Clinical Care Standard which outlines the principles of safe antibiotic prescribing. The Clinical Care Standard was developed to provide guidance to clinicians and health service managers to help ensure optimal treatment for patients who require antibiotics for a bacterial infection.

Standard 3 of the Commission's National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards 'Preventing and Controlling Healthcare Associated Infection,' requires all healthcare services to undertake monitoring of antibiotic usage and resistance, along with other antimicrobials.

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