



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Antibiotic Overuse

Office-Based Antibiotic Prescribing for Persons Aged <15 Years — United States, 1993–2008

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[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

The discovery of antibiotics was one of the greatest medical achievements of the twentieth century. However, overuse of these drugs has led to the development of resistance among bacteria, making antibiotics ineffective in treating certain conditions.

Dr. Tarayn Fairlie is a pediatrician with CDC's National Center for Immunizations and Respiratory Diseases. She's joining us today to discuss the dangers of overusing antibiotics. Welcome to the show, Tarayn.

[Dr. Fairlie] Glad to be here, Bob.

[Dr. Gaynes] Tarayn, why are certain organisms becoming resistant to antibiotics?

[Dr. Fairlie] Bob, when a bacteria's exposed to an antibiotic, it changes genetically in a way that allows it to become resistant the next time it's exposed, so excessive or inappropriate use of antibiotics increases the rates of resistance that we see among bacteria.

[Dr. Gaynes] Why have antibiotics been overprescribed and overused?

[Dr. Fairlie] One reason antibiotics are overprescribed for children is because children more frequently have colds and flus. Antibiotics are frequently prescribed for these infections, despite the fact that the vast majority of them are caused by viruses against which antibiotics are completely ineffective.

[Dr. Gaynes] Many people think that antibiotics help you feel better or get better faster, but, that's not always true, is it?

[Dr. Fairlie] No Bob, it's not. Typically, when a child has a cold or flu, parents should know that most of the time, an antibiotic *won't* help their child get better or feel better more quickly. For serious bacterial infections, antibiotics may be necessary.

[Dr. Gaynes] Well specifically, what illnesses should *not* be treated with an antibiotic?

[Dr. Fairlie] Colds, flus, most ear infections, most sore throats, and cough illnesses do *not* need an antibiotic. Parents should talk to their child's doctor about the best way to treat

their child's illness and shouldn't necessarily expect to receive an antibiotic. Remember, antibiotics are important treatment for bacterial infections, but in order to be able to use them, we should only use them when it's absolutely necessary. It's important to make sure, if your child is prescribed an antibiotic, that they take it as prescribed and finish all their medication.

[Dr. Gaynes] What treatment options are available for those infectious conditions where antibiotics are *not* appropriate?

[Dr. Fairlie] Even for very young infants, a nasal saline wash can help a stuffy or runny nose. For older children, lozenges can help soothe a sore throat. And a warm mist vaporizer can help children with all sorts of respiratory infections feel better. In addition, prevention's very important, especially during the winter season. So, children and parents alike should remember to practice good hand hygiene. Parents should make sure that children are up-to-date with their vaccines.

[Dr. Gaynes] Tarayn, where can listeners get more information about *appropriate* use of antibiotics?

[Dr. Fairlie] www.cdc.gov/getsmart, "getsmart" is all one word, is a great site for parents and physicians. It has information about appropriate antibiotic use and suggestions for prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Tarayn. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Tarayn Fairlie about the dangers of overuse of antibiotics.

In most instances, a cold, an ear infection, and the flu should *not* be treated with antibiotics. If you've been diagnosed with an infectious illness, talk to your health care provider about whether antibiotics will be beneficial and if there are other ways to treat your condition.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.