



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Too Much of a Good Thing

Get Smart About Antibiotics Week — October 5–11, 2009

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[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.

Since the use of molds by ancient civilizations to treat diseases, antibiotics in one form or another have been used to save countless lives. But in modern times, these miracle drugs have often been over-used, resulting in their decreased effectiveness because of an increase in antibiotic-resistant diseases.

Dr. Lauri Hicks is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases, and she's joining us today to discuss the dangers of overusing antibiotics. Welcome to the show, Lauri.

[Dr. Hicks] Thanks for having me here, Bob.

[Dr. Gaynes] Lauri, what types of illnesses require treatment with an antibiotic?

[Dr. Hicks] Well, antibiotics treat bacterial infections, like pneumonia and bloodstream and skin infections. It is really important to remember that antibiotics treat bacteria, not viruses.

[Dr. Gaynes] What kinds of illnesses typically do not require antibiotic treatment?

[Dr. Hicks] Well, illnesses like colds, flu, bronchitis, sinusitis, and most sore throats are caused by viruses. Well over 50 percent of people who go into their doctor's office for a respiratory infection, like a cold, will walk out with an antibiotic even though it is totally ineffective.

[Dr. Gaynes] What problems can be caused by overuse of antibiotics?

[Dr. Hicks] The biggest problem is the development of antibiotic resistance which is when bacteria survive by out-smarting the antibiotic. And what happens is now, common infections may be difficult to treat and when you really need an antibiotic, it may not work.

Another problem is that antibiotics are not harmless. In fact, antibiotics can lead to dangerous side effects

[Dr. Gaynes] Well, what danger does this present to the general public?

[Dr. Hicks] First, it's important to remember that each time you take an antibiotic you are more likely to carry resistant bacteria. And some people can develop a severe allergic reaction or

severe diarrhea. Over half a million kids each year have to go to the ER or their primary care provider due to a bad reaction or a side effect from an antibiotic.

[Dr. Gaynes] So, how does a patient fit in to the decision to use or not use an antibiotic?

[Dr. Hicks] Well, just because your healthcare provider says you don't need an antibiotic, it doesn't mean you're not sick and there aren't other options for treatment. Healthcare providers and patients really need to work together to find the best treatment for your illness. Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist about over-the-counter symptomatic therapy that may help. And you shouldn't forget what your mom told you when you were a kid - get plenty of rest, let your body do the work, drink lots of fluids, and always, always, always wash your hands. You don't want to share those germs with others.

[Dr. Gaynes] Lauri, where can listeners get more information about the proper use of antibiotics?

[Dr. Hicks] CDC has an entire campaign dedicated to appropriate antibiotic use called "Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work." If you need more information about appropriate antibiotic use, please visit www.cdc.gov/getsmart.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Lauri. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Lauri Hicks about the danger of overusing antibiotics.

Remember, not all infections require antibiotic treatment. Many conditions, such as a runny nose, fever, and most sore throats, can be overcome by simply treating the symptoms and letting the illness run its course.

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, 24/7.