

Press release: Keep Antibiotics Working campaign returns

The 'Keep Antibiotics Working' campaign returns to alert the public to the risks of antibiotic resistance, urging them to always take their doctor, nurse or healthcare professional's advice on antibiotics.

Antibiotics are a vital tool used to manage infections. Public Health England's (PHE's) English Surveillance Programme for Antimicrobial Utilisation and Resistance (ESPAUR) [report](#) published today, Tuesday 23 October 2018, highlights how more than 3 million common procedures such as cesarean sections and hip replacements could become life-threatening without them.

Without antibiotics, infections related to surgery could double, putting people at risk of dangerous complications. Cancer patients are also much more vulnerable if antibiotics don't work; both cancer and the treatment (chemotherapy) reduce the ability of the immune system to fight infections. Antibiotics are critical to both prevent and treat infections in these patients.

Antibiotics are essential to treat serious bacterial infections, but they are frequently being used to treat illnesses such as coughs, earache and sore throats that can get better by themselves. Taking antibiotics encourages harmful bacteria that live inside you to become resistant. That means that antibiotics may not work when you really need them.

The threat of antibiotic resistance continues to grow. Bloodstream infections have increased and the report shows that antibiotic-resistant bloodstream infections rose by an estimated 35% between 2013 and 2017.

Despite the risks of antibiotic resistance, research shows that 38% of people still expect an antibiotic from a doctor's surgery, NHS walk-in centre or 'GP out-of-hours' service when they visited with a cough, flu or a throat, ear, sinus or chest infection in 2017.

The 'Keep Antibiotics Working' campaign educates the public about the risks of antibiotic resistance, urging people to always take healthcare professionals' advice as to when they need antibiotics. The campaign also provides effective self-care advice to help individuals and their families feel better if they are not prescribed antibiotics.

Professor Paul Cosford, Medical Director, Public Health England said:

Antibiotics are an essential part of modern medicine, keeping people safe from infection when they are at their most vulnerable. It's concerning that, in the not too distant future, we may see more cancer patients, mothers who've had caesareans and patients who've had other surgery facing life-threatening situations if

antibiotics fail to ward off infections.

We need to preserve antibiotics for when we really need them and we are calling on the public to join us in tackling antibiotic resistance by listening to your GP, pharmacist or nurse's advice and only taking antibiotics when necessary. Taking antibiotics just in case may seem like a harmless act, but it can have grave consequences for you and your family's health in future.

Professor Dame Sally Davies, Chief Medical Officer for England said:

The evidence is clear that without swift action to reduce infections, we are at risk of putting medicine back in the dark ages – to an age where common procedures we take for granted could become too dangerous to perform, and treatable conditions become life-threatening.

The UK has made great efforts in recent years to reduce prescribing rates of antibiotics, however, there continues to be a real need to preserve the drugs we have so that they remain effective for those who really need them and prevent infections emerging in the first place. This is not just an issue for doctors and nurses, the public have a huge role to play – today's data and the launch of the national 'Keep Antibiotics Working' campaign must be a further wake-up call to us all.

Professor Helen Stokes-Lampard, Chair of the Royal College of GPs, said:

GPs are already doing an excellent job at reducing antibiotics prescriptions, but we often come under considerable pressure from patients to prescribe them.

We need to get to a stage where antibiotics are not seen as a 'catch all' for every illness or a 'just in case' backup option – and patients need to understand that if their doctor doesn't prescribe antibiotics it's because they genuinely believe they are not the most appropriate course of treatment.

It's crucial that we continue to get this message out, which is why we're pleased to support Public Health England's 'Keep Antibiotics Working' campaign to make sure we can carry on delivering safe, effective care to our patients both now and in the future.

Background

1. The Ipsos MORI Capibus Survey, 'Attitudes towards antibiotics, 2017' was

conducted between 24 January to 5 February 2017 with a representative sample size of 1,691 adults (aged 15+) in England only. 269 contacted a health professional with a respiratory tract infection in the last year – these participants were asked: “What did you expect from the doctor’s surgery, walk-in centre, urgent or out of hours with your cough, throat, ear, sinus, chest infection or flu?”.

2. The campaign will run from Tuesday 23 October 2018 across England for 8 weeks and will be supported with advertising, partnerships with local pharmacies and GP surgeries, and social media activity.
3. The campaign is part of a wider cross-Government strategy to help preserve antibiotics. The Government’s [‘UK Five Year Antimicrobial Resistance Strategy 2013 to 2018’](#) set out aims to improve the knowledge and understanding of AMR, conserve and steward the effectiveness of existing treatments, and stimulate the development of new antibiotics, diagnostics, and novel therapies.

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