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Local Healthcare Experts Remind Us: Antibiotics Aren't Always the Answer

EAU CLAIRE, February 10, 2016 – Colds, flu, strep throat, ear infections – when are antibiotics appropriate and when are they not? In the midst of cold and flu season, local healthcare experts want to remind people of the facts of antibiotic use.

Antibiotics treat illnesses caused by bacteria such as strep throat, urinary tract infections, and whooping cough. They do not fight illnesses caused by viruses, such as colds, influenza, and bronchitis.

Taking antibiotics for illnesses caused by viruses:

- Will not cure the illness
- Will not keep other people from getting sick
- Will not help you or your child feel better



“Risks exist when you take any medication,” explains Dr. Janki Patel, Infectious Disease, Mayo Clinic Health- Eau Claire, “Taking unnecessary antibiotics may cause harmful side effects and contribute to antibiotic resistance.”

In fact, the Centers for Disease Control estimate that 2 million people in the U.S. become sick every year with bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics. At least 23,000 people die as a direct result. Dr. Patel further explains, “Antibiotic resistance occurs when bacteria mutate and an antibiotic no longer works to kill the bacteria. Misuse of antibiotics can cause bacteria to become resistant to antibiotics.”

When a healthcare provider does not give you an antibiotic, it does not mean you are not sick. It may mean that symptom relief is the best treatment. “Using over-the-counter medications that help reduce the symptoms, drinking more fluids, and getting plenty of rest are often the best treatment for viral illnesses,” explains Paulette Magur, nursing supervisor at the Eau Claire City-County Health Department.

If your healthcare provider prescribes an antibiotic for a bacterial illness, you have responsibilities as a patient.

- Take every dose as prescribed.
- Finish all doses even if you feel well before all the medication is gone. Even though you feel better, that does not mean all the bacteria are gone.
- Take only medication prescribed for you. Different bacteria require different antibiotics.

Antibiotics are life-saving when taken correctly for bacterial illnesses. Taking antibiotics for a viral illness does not help and can have harmful effects. Talk with your healthcare provider about what is best for your illness and follow that advice.

For more information on antibiotic use, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/community>.

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