



COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS



Coming Together To Fight Superbugs

A Secret Danger Hidden In Our Medicine Cabinets

The cause of one of the most pressing public health threats may be sitting in your medicine cabinet right now. Antibiotics and their use, both in humans and animals, comprise the single greatest factor contributing to the emergence of “superbugs” due to antibiotic resistance. This natural phenomenon happens when an antibiotic drug is overused or misused, causing it to lose its ability to fight off super bacteria that have evolved, or mutated. Everyone—from parents and healthcare providers, to veterinarians and industrial farmers—has a role to play to stem this significant and growing public health danger.

Each year more than two million people in the United States become infected with bacteria resistant to antibiotics, and at least 23,000 people die as a result of these infections. While New York State ranks high among states in percent of hospitals with antibiotic management programs, when it comes to rates of antibiotic prescriptions the state does not fare well. Antibiotics are also overused in industrial agriculture both in New York and around the country to reduce the diseases that occur with overcrowded conditions.

For individuals, antibiotics are one of the most often prescribed medicines, and up to 50 percent are either unnecessary or inappropriate. They are not needed for common illnesses like colds, sore throats or the flu. Even some ear infections should not be treated with antibiotics. Each of these is usually caused by viruses, which do not respond to antibiotic treatment. Taking antibiotics when they are not needed not only leads to the development of antibiotic resistant bacteria affecting the entire community, but also increases the chances the individual will experience a bad drug reaction.

If you or your child is sick, ask your healthcare provider these three important questions: What is the best treatment for this illness? If an antibiotic is necessary, is this the right antibiotic for this type of infection? What can I do to help myself, or my child, feel better?

Treating the symptoms offers the best option. Pain relievers, fever reducers, saline nasal spray or drops, warm compresses, liquids and rest all can help an ill child or adult feel better. Ask your healthcare provider or pharmacist what is most recommended for your particular illness. When an antibiotic is warranted, it is important to get the one best targeted to the specific strain of bacteria and that will cause fewer side effects.

Get Smart About Antibiotics Week, an annual observance held in November, was created by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), with the support of a broadening coalition of international and national partners. It seeks to raise awareness of the threat and to spur change with better, more appropriate antibiotic use by individuals and healthcare practitioners and organizations.

Momentum has been building this year on this pressing issue. A Presidential Proclamation was issued from the White House on November 13 and a forum held earlier in June with high-level discussions on the issue of antibiotic stewardship across all sectors.

The next time you or your child is sick, think seriously if an antibiotic is appropriate. Remember, antibiotics are not always the best answer.

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