



Date: June 10, 2008

Contact: Megan D. Smith  
Director of Communications  
[msmith@ohioafp.org](mailto:msmith@ohioafp.org)

## Proper Use of Antibiotics

(COLUMBUS, Ohio)— Antibiotics are powerful drugs used for treating many serious and life-threatening infectious diseases, but taking them when you do not need to can lead to antibiotic-resistant germs. That is why it is crucial to properly administer antibiotics.

Since 1940, scientists have developed over 150 antibiotic drugs to fight the spread of infectious disease. However, too often the abuse of antibiotics results in the development of new hard-to-treat infections; that is why, the decision to properly take antibiotics protects everyone around you.

Antibiotics are only effective against antibacterial infections, certain fungal infections and some kinds of parasites, and should not be used to treat viruses, such as the common cold or the flu. However, according to Suellywn Stewart, M.D., a family physician in Columbus, Ohio, the most common misuse of antibiotics is for viral illnesses or upper respiratory illnesses.

The proper use of antibiotics requires responsibility, and following a list of critical steps. To begin, again, it is crucial to know that you should not expect to take antibiotics every time you are sick. Do not pressure your physician for antibiotics if you have a viral illness because the medicine could then cause more harm than good.

“I advise patients to complete the full course of antibiotics, once again teaching the patient that misuse of antibiotics can create resistance,” Stewart said.

You should never take antibiotics without a prescription. If you did not finish your medication the first time you were sick, it might be tempting to take it for future illnesses, or even pass it along to someone else. This is not a good idea, because the specific medication or the leftover dosage may not be helpful in combating your new illness.

Since it is common for people to misuse antibiotics, which increases the resistance of hard-to-treat bacteria, there has been a result of more antibiotics being developed and less antibiotics working.

“The efficacy of antibiotics has begun to decrease especially in more common illnesses such as otitis media, bronchitis, community acquired pneumonia and some sexually transmitted infections,” explains Stewart. “The pharmaceutical industry continues research and development of more potent and more costly antibiotics. It is a catch 22.”

To prevent having to take antibiotics in the first place, it is important to practice good hygiene. Simple tasks such as washing your hands thoroughly and keeping food preparation areas clean can help achieve a healthy body.

*The Ohio Academy of Family Physicians is a statewide professional association with more than 4,400 members, including practicing physicians, family medicine residents and medical students. The scope of family medicine encompasses all ages, both sexes and every disease entity. Family physicians provide comprehensive, continuing care to all members of the family.*



## FACT SHEET

Date: June 10, 2008

Contact: Megan D. Smith  
Director of Communications  
msmith@ohioafp.org

### Proper Use of Antibiotics:

- Understand when antibiotics should be used.
- Do not pressure your physician for antibiotics if you have a viral illness.
- Take antibiotics exactly as prescribed.
- Never take antibiotics without a prescription.

### When and When *Not* to Take Antibiotics:

- Cold and flu: These are viral illness and cannot be cured with the use of antibiotics
- Cough or bronchitis: Almost always viruses cause these illnesses. However, if the problem lasts a long time bacteria could be the cause, in which case antibiotics would be valuable.
- Sore throat: Most sore throats are caused by viruses and do not need antibiotics. However, strep throat is caused by bacteria and your physician should prescribe you an antibiotic.
- Ear infections: Antibiotics are used for some ear infections—it all depends on the specific infection.
- Sinus infections: Antibiotics are often used to treat sinus infections *if* it extends beyond a cough and a runny nose.

### How to Prevent Having to Take Antibiotics:

- Wash your hands thoroughly throughout the day, especially after going to the bathroom and changing diapers.
- Keep food preparation areas clean

Sources: [www.familydoctor.org](http://www.familydoctor.org)  
[www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)