

Louisiana Pharmacists Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Louisiana Pharmacists Association Promotes Proper Use of Antibiotics

Does your New Year's resolution include improving your health in 2012? When considering your resolution, did you give thought to proper use of antibiotics for infections? While many people are dieting and hitting the gym, in an effort to be physically fit, others are hitting the waiting rooms at doctors' offices and emergency rooms in search of antibiotics for their illness. Unknowingly to most people, antibiotics have a tremendous impact on the overall health of our community.

Antibiotics are critical assets used in treating infections caused by bacteria. However, antibiotic overuse and misuse has contributed significantly to the development of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Antibiotic-resistance occurs when bacteria change genetically in such a way to reduce or abolish the efficacy of medications used to treat and prevent infections. Infections caused by antibiotic-resistant bacteria are often difficult to treat and can result in longer illness, increased doctor visits, or the need for stronger, more costly medication. Therefore, it is extremely important to be educated about the proper use of antibiotics in order to keep yourself, your family, and your community protected.

When should I use an antibiotic?

Determining whether you need an antibiotic depends on the type of infection you have. Antibiotics are useful against bacterial infections, some fungal infections, and certain parasites; but they are not effective against infections caused by viruses. Many types of common illnesses,

such as colds, influenza (flu), stomach flu, most ear infections, most coughs, and most sore throats, are caused by viruses and do not respond to antibiotics. Only your physician can determine whether an antibiotic is right for you. The first step is to consult your physician to determine whether you have a bacterial or viral infection. More importantly, you should always consult your physician any time you suspect an infection to determine the right course of action.

Proper use of antibiotics

- Understand when antibiotics are necessary. You should not expect an antibiotic every time you are ill. Antibiotics do not work for viral infections, and even some common bacterial illnesses, such as mild ear infections, do not benefit significantly from antibiotics.
- If you have a viral infection, do not insist your physician prescribe an antibiotic. Ask your physician whether he thinks the infection is bacterial or viral, and whether antibiotics will be beneficial. If you have a viral infection, discuss with your physician or pharmacist ways to relieve the symptoms. Be sure to tell your pharmacist any and all other medications you are taking when asking about over-the-counter medications.
- Take antibiotics exactly as prescribed. It is important to take antibiotics as your doctor has prescribed. Do not stop taking it a few days early, even if you begin to feel better. A shortened course of treatment often only eliminates the most vulnerable bacteria, while allowing the stronger bacteria to survive. Consult your pharmacist about how to take your antibiotic and what to expect from it.
- Never take an antibiotic without a prescription. Using leftover antibiotic the next time you are sick or giving it to someone else who is ill is not a good practice. A single antibiotic is not effective against all bacterial infections and may not be appropriate for future infections. Even if it is, you may not have enough of the medication for a full course of treatment. Only your healthcare team can determine the most appropriate antibiotic and course of treatment.
- Always practice good hygiene. Good hygiene is the first line of defense in preventing infections. Wash your hands with soap and water often throughout the day, especially after using the bathroom or handling raw meat. Keep food preparation areas clean, as well.

Antibiotic-resistance is a pressing health concern with global impacts. When you misuse antibiotics, you contribute to the development of resistant bacteria that cause infections which are often more severe and more difficult to treat. Therefore, your decisions about using antibiotics have widespread consequences. As you maintain your pledge to be healthier this year,

take a moment to consider how responsible use of antibiotics can protect your health and that of your community.

References:

1. Mayo Clinic. Antibiotics: Misuse puts you and others at risk. Feb 2010. Available at: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/antibiotics/FL00075>. Accessed on: January 2, 2012.
2. Terrie, Y. A Patient's Guide to Proper Antibiotic Usage. *Pharmacy Times*. Dec 2004. Available at: <http://www.pharmacytimes.com/publications/issue/2004/2004-12/2004-12-4835>. Accessed on: January 2, 2012.

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The Louisiana Pharmacists Association, established in 1882, strives to promote the interests of all pharmacists of the State of Louisiana. For more information about the LPA and its benefits, contact Phyllis Perron, LPA Executive Director at 225/346-6883 or visit our website at www.louisianapharmacists.com.

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