

# Infection Prevention and You



## What is antimicrobial stewardship?

Antimicrobial stewardship is the conservation of antibiotics, so they continue to work effectively. This can be accomplished by using antibiotics properly. It is important to know that antibiotics only treat bacterial infections, not viral infections. All healthcare facilities should have antimicrobial stewardship programs in place.

## What does antimicrobial stewardship mean for healthcare providers?

Healthcare providers are now being more careful when prescribing antibiotics. Once your provider discovers a bacterial infection, he or she will identify the correct antibiotic and prescribe the right dosage and length of time you will need to take the medicine.

## What does antimicrobial stewardship mean to me?

Antimicrobial stewardship programs benefit you. The improper usage of antibiotics can lead to antibiotic-resistant infections. Each year in the United States, at least 2 million people get serious infections with bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics, and at least 23,000 people die each year as a result of these antibiotic-resistant infections. Using antibiotics the wrong way can cause bacteria to grow into superbugs, making your next infection much harder to treat. That's why it's so important for healthcare facilities to have antimicrobial stewardship programs.

## What can my healthcare provider do to prevent antimicrobial resistance?

Your provider can follow an antimicrobial stewardship program to prevent antimicrobial resistance to:

- **Limit inappropriate use of antibiotics.** In the hospital as well as the outpatient or clinic setting, antibiotics are frequently used when they are not necessary. An example of this is when patients receive antibiotics for viral infections like the common cold or a sore throat. Antibiotics kill bacteria only—not viruses.
- **Lower the chance for antibiotic-resistant bacteria to develop.** Patients exposed to antibiotics are at a higher risk of being infected with resistant germs or organisms. This exposure puts the patient at risk for multidrug-resistant infections and severely limits the ways the patient can be treated.
- **Prevent *Clostridium difficile* diarrhea.** *Clostridium difficile*, also known as the “deadly diarrhea,” can increase the patient’s length of stay in the hospital and how long they will need to take antibiotics, as well as increasing the chance they might need to go back to the hospital. Most cases of *C. difficile* happen in patients who are taking antibiotics. The Centers for Disease and Prevention (CDC) recently reported that nearly half a million Americans suffered from *C. difficile* infections in a single year and an estimated 15,000 deaths occur because of these infections. In addition, a recent study showed that of 150,000 people who got *C. difficile*, 82 percent of these patients visited a doctor’s or dentist’s office in the 12 weeks before their diagnosis—not the hospital.

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## What can I do to prevent antimicrobial resistance?

The best way to help prevent antimicrobial resistance is to learn the ABC's of Antibiotics:

- **Ask.** Ask your healthcare provider, "Are these antibiotics necessary?"
- **Bacteria.** Antibiotics do not kill viruses. They only kill bacteria.
- **Complete the course.** Take all of your antibiotics *exactly* as prescribed (even if you are feeling better).

Don't pressure your healthcare provider for antibiotics. You do not need antibiotics for:

- Colds or flu;
- Most coughs or bronchitis;
- Sore throats not caused by strep;
- Runny noses; or
- Most ear aches.

## What is the federal government doing to help prevent antibiotic resistance?

Antimicrobial resistance is a serious issue. President Obama issued an executive order in September 2014 to reduce the threat of multidrug-resistant bacteria. This was followed by a White House Fact Sheet in January 2015 that announced the FY2016 budget submission nearly doubling the amount of funding for combating antibiotic resistance. This executive order should be viewed as a direct shout-out to all healthcare organizations that we must become active participants in combating antimicrobial resistance.

To help hospitals develop antibiotic stewardship programs, CDC has developed several tools, including a list of Core Elements of Hospital Antibiotic Stewardship Programs and an accompanying checklist. In addition, the CDC's National Strategy to Combat Antibiotic Resistant Bacteria (CARB) will enhance national capabilities for antibiotic stewardship, outbreak surveillance, and antibiotic resistance prevention. These efforts hold the potential to cut the incidence of *C. difficile* infections in half.

An effective antimicrobial stewardship program can provide an organization the tools needed to prevent the overuse of valuable resources and help control the increase in antimicrobial resistance.

## Additional resources (links are case sensitive)

APIC – The ABC's of Antibiotics infographic <http://goo.gl/8kRgkv>

CDC – Get Smart Know When Antibiotics Work <http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/>

APIC – Ask questions about your medications <http://goo.gl/W5Mgrk>

CDC – Antibiotic resistance <http://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/index.html>

Mayo Clinic – Antimicrobial stewardship <http://goo.gl/Lhs1ni>

The White House – Executive Order – Combating antibiotic-resistant bacteria <http://goo.gl/q2nLZT>

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