

[IMAGE]

Got the Flu? Antibiotics Won't Help

Most infections are caused by one of two main types of germs: bacteria or viruses. Most coughs and sore throats (and all colds) are caused by viruses, meaning that antibiotics cannot help. In fact, The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) makes this clear, advising: “antibiotics should not be used to treat viral infections.”

Children receive a disproportionate number of antibiotic prescriptions, particularly to treat upper respiratory infections. Evidence suggests that many times, these prescriptions are unnecessary because they are given not for URIs, but for viral infections such as the common cold.

Apparently many doctors aren't paying attention to this information. Consider the results of a three-part study published last year in the journal *Pediatrics*. Survey responses from 366 pediatricians and family physicians were compared with published recommendations on diagnosis and treatment of URIs; patient charts from 25 randomly selected pediatricians were reviewed; and a sample of parents from each practice was interviewed by telephone.

Although 97% of physicians agreed that antibiotic overuse is a major factor contributing to resistance, many did not follow recently published recommendations for judicious antibiotic use: 86% prescribed antibiotics for bronchitis regardless of the duration of cough, and 42% prescribed antibiotics inappropriately for the common cold. Most revealing perhaps was the observation that physicians who prescribed antibiotics more prudently had up to 30% less total office visits per child per year.

In other words, more isn't necessary better, especially not when it comes to antibiotics! Talk to your doctor about the pros and cons of antibiotic use, and about the many effective nonpharmaceutical alternatives available.

Reference:

Watson RL, Dowell SF, Jayaraman M, et al. Antimicrobial use for pediatric upper respiratory infections: reported practice, actual practice, and parent beliefs. *Pediatrics*, Dec. 1999: Vol. 104, No. 6, pp1251-57.

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