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HHS, PUBLIC HEALTH PARTNERS UNVEIL NEW CAMPAIGN TO PROMOTE AWARENESS OF PROPER ANTIBIOTIC USE

The Department of Health and Human Services and a consortium of national health organizations today urged consumers to be cautious about their use of antibiotics as the cold and flu season approaches. Officials stressed that antibiotics are ineffective treatment for viruses, such as those that cause colds and flu, and that inappropriate antibiotic use — particularly among children — is contributing to an alarming growth of global antibiotic resistance.

“Antibiotics show amazing results when used to treat bacterial infections, but they won’t help at all against the common cold or flu,” Surgeon General Richard Carmona said. “What’s worse, if people take antibiotics when they don’t need them, it can make these important drugs less effective in the future. This is part of health literacy and closing the gap between what health-care professionals know and what Americans understand.”

The message is part of a new national campaign unveiled by HHS’ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and major national health organizations in Chicago today.

“Antibiotics are powerful drugs. In fact, sometimes we imagine they are wonder drugs that can treat any infections,” said CDC Director Julie Gerberding, M.D. “But the truth is antibiotics only work against bacteria, not the viruses that cause colds and flu,” she added. “It’s so important to get smart about antibiotic use and work with your doctor to get the right remedy during this cold and flu season.”

Antibiotic resistance can cause significant danger and suffering for children and adults who have common infections that were once easily treatable with antibiotics. Over the last decade, almost every type of bacteria has become stronger and less responsive to antibiotic treatment when it is really needed. These antibiotic-resistant bacteria can quickly spread to family members, school mates, and co-workers — threatening the community with a new strain of infectious disease that is more difficult to cure and more expensive to treat.

CDC, FDA, and an alliance of partners including national health organizations, state and local health departments, managed care organizations, pharmaceutical companies, and other groups concerned about this problem, hope to reverse the public perception that ‘antibiotics cure everything’ by unveiling a public health campaign, *Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work*, today at the American Society of Microbiology’s 43rd Interscience Conference on Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy. The campaign relies on featuring a series of television, radio, and print public service announcements and comprehensive national, state, and local outreach. The campaign aims to better inform Americans about when antibiotic treatment is warranted.

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“We are pleased to be partnering with CDC on this very important health message. By joining our efforts with those at the state level and private sector we hope that more people will begin to understand the importance of prudent antibiotic use. This campaign will help ensure that antibiotics continue to save lives,” FDA Commissioner Dr. Mark B. McClellan said.

According to the CDC, tens of millions of the antibiotics are prescribed in doctors’ offices for viral infections that are not treatable with antibiotics. Doctors cite diagnostic uncertainty, time pressure, and patient demand as the primary reasons for their tendency to over-prescribe antibiotics.

“Our first step toward correcting the problem is to build public knowledge and awareness of when antibiotics work — and when they don’t,” said Richard Besser, M.D., CDC’s medical director of the campaign. “We want Americans to keep their families and communities healthy by getting smart about the proper use of antibiotics.”

The campaign is being supported by many public health groups, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics and Council for Affordable Quality Healthcare.

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Note: All HHS press releases, fact sheets and other press materials are available at www.hhs.gov/news