PRESS RELEASE

17 November 2015

Care for yourself – and everyone else – in World Antibiotic Awareness Week

We have all heard of antibiotics, an important range of medicines for treating infections. But bacteria, the bugs that cause many sorts of infection, can change to survive the effects of antibiotics. The more we use antibiotics, the more quickly that happens.

Without effective antibiotics, common infections and minor injuries could become life-threatening. This is not just a problem for the future – antibiotic resistance is already one of the biggest threats to patients’ safety in Europe.

This is driven by overusing antibiotics and prescribing them inappropriately. European Antibiotic Awareness Day happens on 18 November every year to remind people about the danger. There are efforts across the globe to tackle the problem, including the first ever World Antibiotic Awareness Week that launched yesterday, Monday 16 November.

But we can all make a difference – and there’s a simple way to find out how, through the Antibiotic Guardian scheme.

Everyone can pledge to become an Antibiotic Guardian, choosing a simple action to help protect our antibiotics. Just visit http://antibioticguardian.com/ to pick the pledge that suits you best.

Dr Caroline Dollery, who chairs Mid Essex Clinical Commissioning Group, said: “The message from World Antibiotic Awareness Week is an important one, and we can all take action. Antibiotics are not the answer for many of the conditions some people want them for. Antibiotics do not work on colds, or for most coughs, sore throats and earache. Your body can usually fight these infections on its own.

“It’s also Self Care Week from Monday 16 November, so if you have a cough, sore throat, common cold or sinusitis, make sure you get plenty of rest and drink plenty of fluids. You can ask your local pharmacist about relief for symptoms or discomfort.

“Please only take antibiotics when a health professional prescribes them for you – and if they do, it really is important that you always take them as advised.”

Here is some guidance on self care for minor conditions, during Self Care Week and beyond.
Good hygiene can help avoid spreading infections while you are ill.

And remember, skipping doses of antibiotics, not taking them at regular intervals, saving some for later or sharing antibiotics with others may be contributing to antibiotic resistance. The Antibiotic Guardian pledges help us all avoid these.

ENDS

Note to editors

- Public Health England has produced a short video explaining antibiotic resistance, which you can find at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PhmyNBWGik](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PhmyNBWGik).
- Antibiotics do not work for ANY colds, or for most coughs, sore throats or earache. Your body can usually fight these infections on its own.
- The more we use antibiotics, the greater the chance that bacteria will become resistant to them so that they no longer work on our infections.
- When antibiotics are prescribed by a health professional – the only time you should use them – always take as directed.
- Antibiotics can have side effects as they upset the natural balance of bacteria potentially resulting in diarrhoea and/or thrush. The use of inappropriate antibiotics may also allow other more harmful bacteria to increase.
- Antibiotics also cause other side effects such as rashes, stomach pains and reactions to sunlight.
- Antibiotic resistant bacteria don’t just affect you, they can spread to other people (and animals) in close contact with you and are very difficult to treat.
- Pet owners should bear in mind that bacteria, including those carrying antibiotic resistance, can be transferred between animals and humans and vice versa, so it is important to practice good hygiene to minimise this.
- Follow the advice given by your vet for any antibiotics prescribed for your pet. Complete the full course prescribed and observe any withdrawal period.