

Growing drug resistance will lead to long-term harm

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Drugs that fight many common infectious diseases are becoming less effective because of increased antibiotic resistance, a direct consequence of persistent high levels of community antibiotic use in New Zealand.

A University of Auckland study has analysed almost 5 million

antibacterial prescriptions dispensed in New Zealand during 2015 and found that per head of population, courses of antibiotics were more commonly dispensed to Pacific and Māori people than to people of European, Asian or other ethnicities.

"This is not surprising as many infectious diseases, for example [rheumatic fever](#), are more common in Pacific and Māori people," says lead author Dr. Mark Thomas, of the Faculty's Department of Molecular Medicine and Pathology.

The study, just published in the *New Zealand Medical Journal* found that while admission to hospital for [acute rheumatic fever](#) is approximately 50 times more common in Pacific and Māori people, the rate of dispensing of the antibiotics commonly used to prevent acute rheumatic fever was only 1-2 times more common in Pacific and Maori people, when compared with people of all other ethnicities.

"The authors think that the antibiotics commonly prescribed for sore throat, to prevent rheumatic fever, are being hugely over-prescribed for European, Asian and other people, who are at extremely low risk of rheumatic [fever](#)."

Dr. Thomas says the study findings strongly suggest that a very large proportion of the antibiotics dispensed in New Zealand are of no benefit to patients.

"There is considerable scope to reduce antibiotic prescribing in New Zealand, especially for patients with winter coughs and colds."

"All New Zealanders should make efforts to reduce their antibiotic consumption, and the greatest opportunities to reduce unnecessary antibiotic consumption are in people of European, Asian and other ethnicities."

"High rates of antibiotic consumption in New Zealand are leading to high rates of antibiotic resistance in the bacteria that infect people in New Zealand."

"If the present very high levels of antibiotic use continue, antibiotic resistance will be much worse in the years ahead than if we promptly and dramatically reduce our unnecessary use."

Dr. Thomas says the higher levels of antibiotic dispensing for Pacific and Māori people appear to have contributed to methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) becoming a more common cause of staphylococcal infection in Pacific and Māori people than in people of other ethnicities.

Everybody needs to understand that a large proportion of the antibiotics dispensed in the community in New Zealand are unnecessary. All antibiotic use increases the spread of [antibiotic resistance](#).

"We should only take [antibiotics](#) when they may make a genuine difference to our health."

Provided by University of Auckland

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