

Dental antibiotics up 25% during pandemic: study

November 13 2020

The amount of antibiotics prescribed by dentists in Britain has soared by a quarter since COVID-19 struck, according to research published Friday highlighting the risk of a "slow-motion" pandemic of antibiotic resistance.

The study, published in the *British Dental Journal*, found there was a 60-percent jump in prescriptions by dentists in London in the three months from April to July compared with the same period a year earlier.

The lowest increase was in the southwest of England, which still saw prescriptions rise 10 percent in the same period.

Researchers said more antibiotics were being prescribed as patients see their access to dental procedures severely curtailed as a result of the coronavirus lockdowns and the postponement of non-emergency medical operations.

However, antibiotics do not cure toothache and are often given to patients when a dental procedure would be equally or more effective in removing the source of infection.

"Antibiotics are life-saving drugs; when people really need them, they really need to work," said Wendy Thompson, study author and clinical academic in primary dental care at the University of Manchester.

"Infections that are resistant to antibiotics pose a serious risk to patient

safety—which is why the large rise in dental antibiotic prescribing is a huge concern."

The World Health Organization has repeatedly called for action to tackle growing global antibiotic resistance (ABR).

Yet it is still increasing and it is estimated that infections resistant to drugs will be the number one cause of death globally within the next 30 years.

The World Dental Federation on Friday released a white paper highlighting the urgency of the situation, which is supported by an online library to guide dentists.

"We are staring down a slow-motion pandemic and urgent collective action is needed to slow it down," said FDI President Gerhard Seeberger.

"Moving forward, the dental profession has a clear responsibility to engage, commit and contribute to global, national and local efforts to tackle antibiotic resistance."

More information: Sagar Shah et al, How did COVID-19 impact on dental antibiotic prescribing across England?, *British Dental Journal* (2020). [DOI: 10.1038/s41415-020-2336-6](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41415-020-2336-6)

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