

Antibiotics – friend and foe?

November 18 2013

European Antibiotic Awareness Day is marked on the 18th November every year. This year in Norway, a seminar for health care providers about antibiotic use and resistance will be held, as well as several local events around the country for both doctors and the public.

The focus is on appropriate antibiotic prescription to ensure correct treatment and to reduce antibiotic use, and thus limit the development of [resistant bacteria](#).

Useful information to parents of young children

The Norwegian Institute of Public Health and the Antibiotic Centre for Primary Care (ASP) have developed information for doctors and parents about the correct use of antibiotics for [respiratory tract infections](#) in children.

In the week before and the day after Antibiotic Awareness Day, a silent animation about prescribing antibiotics to children will be shown in the waiting room at some doctor's surgeries. Here is the English version:

Both hero and villain?

Historically, antibiotics are among the drugs that have had the greatest impact on [public health](#), helping us to gain control over many infectious diseases that were once prevalent. Both incidence and mortality have been reduced following antibiotic treatment.

Antibiotic use also makes it possible to implement sophisticated medical treatment and to treat complications following surgery and cancer therapy.

When used correctly, antibiotics still save lives in the treatment of many [infectious diseases](#).

However, there are also unwanted effects of antibiotic use for both the individual and society. Globally, there has been a dramatic increase in the prevalence of bacteria that are resistant to the most common types of antibiotics. There is a clear link between antibiotic use in the community and the occurrence of resistant bacteria. Since the resistant bacteria can also infect people who do not use antibiotics, it is in everyone's interest that antibiotics are used correctly and only when needed. The consequences of [antibiotic resistance](#) are decreased efficacy of the various drugs and increased risk of complications and death from severe infections. In Europe it is estimated that approximately 25,000 deaths each year are attributable to infection with resistant bacteria.

Antibiotics - only when needed

The use of antibiotics is increasing steadily, to the point where antibiotics are not only used against dangerous diseases but also against harmless but bothersome conditions. Over the last ten years in Norway we have seen a steady annual increase in antibiotic consumption, despite increased awareness of the rising prevalence of resistant bacteria.

Since 2004, the proportion of the population who were prescribed an antibiotic has increased and in 2012 at least one course of antibiotics was dispensed to a quarter of the population. We also see that the use of resistance-promoting, broad-spectrum agents is increasing at the expense of the more narrow-spectrum penicillin. An increased focus on correct antibiotic prescribing hopes to reverse that trend.

Avoiding unnecessary [antibiotic treatment](#) will prevent resistant bacteria in the individual and thus prevent the increase of resistant bacteria in society. High incidence in the population increases the chance of being infected with resistant bacteria, regardless of an individual's antibiotic use.

To promote appropriate use of [antibiotics](#), guidelines have been developed for antibiotic use for both specialist and [primary care](#).

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) has created a short video with a focus on antibiotic use and resistance:

Provided by Norwegian Institute of Public Health

Citation: Antibiotics – friend and foe? (2013, November 18) retrieved 19 September 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-11-antibiotics-friend-foe.html>

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