

Good infection prevention and control practice, including hand hygiene, will help prevent antibiotic resistance from spreading from one patient to another.

Please see the patients guide to 'reducing the risk of infection' leaflet for more details.

Any further questions

If you have any further questions please feel free to contact the Infection Prevention & control team, on 0207 288 3261, or you can ask the ward manager to contact us.

Public Health England website also provides additional information www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or

whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please contact us on 020 7288 3182. We will try our best to meet your needs.

Twitter.com/WhitHealth
Facebook.com/WhittingtonHealth

Whittington Health NHS Trust
Magdala Avenue
London
N19 5NF
Phone: 020 7272 3070
www.whittington.nhs.uk

Date published: 22/01/2020
Review date: 22/01/2022
Ref: GEN/NPE/IPC/ARB/01

© Whittington Health
Please recycle



Infection Prevention & Control

Antibiotic resistant bacteria

A patient's guide



What are antibiotics?

They are medicines that kill or interfere with the growth of bacteria, which are organisms that can cause infections.

Antibiotics are used to treat and sometimes prevent bacterial infection. Most antibiotics are taken by mouth. Some might be put on the skin, for example a cream, and others injected.

What is antibiotic resistance?

Different bacteria are killed by different antibiotics. Some bacteria are naturally resistant and are very difficult to kill, even with antibiotics.

Some bacteria can become resistant after exposure to antibiotics, especially if the patient does not finish the full course or has not been prescribed enough of the antibiotic to kill all the bacteria.

Bacteria adapt well to different conditions, which means they can quickly become resistant to more antibiotics making some infections they cause harder to treat.

There are also a number of bacteria that are resistant to more than one antibiotic and these are called “multi-resistant bacteria”.

Can antibiotic resistance spread?

Bacteria multiply very quickly; one bacterium can multiply to become a million in a matter of hours. Once a resistant strain develops, this strain will multiply rapidly too.

The resistant bacteria then spread through direct contact with a person with the infection, in the same way that other bacteria are spread, most often via hands and sometimes healthcare equipment, such as blood pressure machines, heart monitors.

Antibiotic resistance is a particular problem in hospitals and places like nursing and residential homes, where there are many vulnerable people, often with lower immunity against infections. In these settings treatment with antibiotics is often necessary, encouraging resistant bacteria to emerge.

How serious is antibiotic resistance?

An infection caused by antibiotic resistant bacteria may be harder to treat and may result in a longer illness.

The alternative antibiotics available for treatment may be less effective or cause more side-effects. They may also have to be given in larger doses and by injection rather than by mouth.

Can antibiotic resistance be prevented?

Antibiotic resistance is to some extent inevitable because we cannot stop using antibiotics altogether. However, we can slow down its development and contain its spread by using antibiotics carefully:

- **We educate all our staff and patients** about their appropriate use. The majority of simple coughs, colds, sore throats and influenza are caused by viruses, and antibiotics do not help to fight viral infections.
- **We have an antibiotic policy for all prescribers to follow.** This helps to ensure that the chosen antibiotic is suitable for the patient’s illness and also unlikely to encourage further antibiotic resistance.
- If you have been prescribed antibiotics, you should complete the whole course as advised by your doctor. This is because stopping before the end of the course may make it easier for the resistant bacteria to take over.
- We monitor antibiotic prescribing and administration against the Trust policy and report findings to clinical teams on a regular basis.