

Antimicrobial Stewardship Guide

Educate & Engage Residents, Family

➤ What are antibiotics?

- Antibiotics are medicines that fight infections caused by bacteria. Antibiotics work by targeting and killing harmful bacteria.

➤ How do people get bacterial infections?

- Normally, your immune system helps control the bacteria you have. But, sometimes bacteria grow so quickly that your immune system can't keep up and then you may develop an infection that needs to be treated.

➤ When are antibiotics used to treat urinary tract infections (UTIs)?

- A urinary tract infection (UTI) is an infection involving any part of the urinary system, including urethra, bladder, and kidney. If you are experiencing symptoms of an infection and bacteria are found, you will typically be prescribed an antibiotic.
- Antibiotics do not help when there are no UTI symptoms. In fact, taking antibiotics when they are not needed may cause health problems.
- If you do not have any symptoms, but your urine sample shows some bacteria, it may be better to wait and drink extra water or other beverages. Nurses may check on you and ask you to drink more for a few days.

➤ When are antibiotics used to treat lower respiratory tract infections or LRTI?

- There are many different kinds of respiratory tract infections, such as colds and coughs, the flu, pneumonia, and bronchitis. Not all respiratory tract infections need to be treated with an antibiotic.
- Doctors often use antibiotics to treat some lower respiratory tract infections like pneumonia and bronchitis.
- The most common symptoms of a respiratory infection needing an antibiotic are a fever with a bad cough. A cough alone is typically not treated with an antibiotic.
- If you are only experiencing a cough, it is often better to wait. Your doctor will request that nurses check on you often to see how you are feeling, take your temperature, and ask if you are experiencing any other symptoms. They may give you acetaminophen (Tylenol) and/or a cough suppressant to make you feel better. They may also ask you to drink more fluids and raise your head with pillows. Nurses may check on you more and provide acetaminophen for a few days.

➤ **What are the risks—or harms—of antibiotics?**

- Antibiotics are important for treating you when you definitely have an infection, but unneeded antibiotics can do more harm than good.
- Before taking an antibiotic, it is important to understand how antibiotics could harm or hurt you. There are five potential health problems that occur as a result of taking an antibiotic.
 1. Allergic reactions, like a rash or swelling.
 2. Side effects, such as a stomach upset.
 3. Drug interactions.
 4. An infection called *Clostridium difficile* or *C. diff*.
 5. Antibiotic resistance.

➤ **What is our nursing home doing to decrease the chance of these risks?**

- Improving the way we use antibiotics for our residents is one way we can protect your health and ensure the safety of your care.
- Our nursing home is taking action in two ways to make sure that you and other residents get the right care at the right time.
 - First, we share information and help you understand the risks of antibiotics.
 - Second, we have a program to—
 - Make sure you get antibiotics only when absolutely necessary—when you have a bacterial infection.
 - Make sure that you get the right antibiotic, at the right time, for the right length of time.

➤ **What can you do to get the best care for yourself?**

- Ask your doctor or a nurse about the benefits and risks of taking an antibiotic.
- Tell someone, including myself or another nurse, if you want more information—or have concerns—about antibiotics and their risks.

When you take an antibiotic, you may experience several side effects such as a rash, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, and headaches. If you are (or think you may be) experiencing any of these side effects—or just feel different—let a nurse know immediately.

We are always happy to hear your concerns regarding your loved one. When symptoms are vague, we will provide active monitoring for a few days with nursing assessment to focus in if true infection is presenting and working with your physician if treatment is indicated.