



A European Health Initiative 

PRESS RELEASE:

Experts urge prudent antibiotic use to combat resistance

On European Antibiotic Awareness Day 18 November 2009, new European-wide surveillance data on antibiotic resistance from the European Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance System (EARSS) shows that the development of antibiotic resistance represents a growing threat to the effectiveness of antibiotics. Moreover, a recent survey among European intensive care physicians published in the scientific journal *Eurosurveillance* showed that patients infected with totally or almost totally resistant bacteria are now being seen across Europe, with 8% of intensive care physicians surveyed reporting having treated more than ten cases of infections with such bacteria in the last six months. Resistance of *Escherichia coli* (*E. coli*), a common cause of community- or hospital-acquired urinary tract infection, showed a Europe-wide increase to all antibiotic classes under surveillance by EARSS. A high frequency of resistance with regard to *Klebsiella pneumoniae* (*K. pneumoniae*), an important cause of urinary and respiratory tract infections especially in people with impaired immune systems, was also reported across Europe, with particularly high levels in central and south-eastern countries. Following sustained efforts to contain the spread of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), a decrease was reported in some countries, although one third of the European countries are still reporting MRSA proportions above 25%.

Speaking today at an EU-level launch seminar for European Antibiotic Awareness Day, Swedish Minister for Elderly Care and Public Health, Maria Larsson, said: *"It is of critical importance that we encourage prudent use of the antibiotics in order to combat resistance and safeguard the effectiveness of antibiotics in the future. The Swedish EU Presidency conference on innovative incentives for effective antibiotics high lighted the urgent need to stimulate development of new antibiotics."*

ECDC's Director, Zsuzsanna Jakab, stressed that, *"Rising levels of resistance being reported across Europe to a number of essential antibiotics, and the emergence of bacteria that are resistant to all known antibiotics, is directly linked to the use of antibiotics. Without effective antibiotics, modern medical treatments such as operations, transplants and intensive care will become impossible. European Antibiotic Awareness Day aims to raise awareness about the threat to public health of antibiotic resistance and to communicate about the importance of prudent antibiotic use in order to turn the tide on antibiotic resistance."*

Prudent antibiotic use is critically important because antibiotic over-use unnecessarily causes bacteria to become resistant to antibiotic treatments. Antibiotics are only effective against bacterial infections and cannot help the recovery process from common colds and flu, which are the result of viral infections. The correct diagnosis and the decision about whether antibiotics are necessary can only be made by a medical doctor.



About European Antibiotic Awareness Day

European Antibiotic Awareness Day emphasises the need for people to take antibiotics only with a doctor's prescription and as prescribed in order to maximise their effects and prevent the emergence of resistant bacteria. In 2009, European Antibiotics Awareness Day focuses on the role of primary care prescribers in promoting appropriate use of antibiotics in outpatients, with particular attention on respiratory tract infections such as common colds and flu. Primary care accounts for 80-90% of all antibiotic prescriptions, a large proportion of which, as scientific data shows, has no benefit in terms of helping patients to overcome infections. Primary care prescribers – such as general practitioners – therefore have a crucial role to play in promoting the appropriate use of antibiotics among their patients. For more information, visit: <http://antibiotic.ecdc.europa.eu>

Links

Eurosurveillance article: Experience of European intensive care physicians with infections due to antibiotic-resistant bacteria, 2009

Further publications on antimicrobial resistance can be accessed from this week's issue of Eurosurveillance

Further information on surveillance of antibiotic resistance can be accessed from the EARSS website

Background information on ECDC

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) is an EU agency tasked with identifying assessing and communicating threats to human health posed by infectious diseases. It supports the work of public health authorities in the EU and EEA/EFTA Member States.

Further information

More information on antibiotic resistance is available on our website: <http://ecdc.europa.eu>

ECDC press office

Tel: +46 (0)8 586 01 678

Email: press@ecdc.europa.eu

Göran Holmström, Political Advisor to Maria Larsson

Tel: +46 (0)705 155 760

Email: goran.holmstrom@social.ministry.se