

Widespread Public Misconception About Antibiotics



According to a new survey by Public Health England (PHE), nearly 40 percent of people are unnecessarily taking antibiotics for coughs or runny noses while 90 percent are unaware that drug-resistant bacteria can spread from person to person. These findings were released to mark the European Antibiotics Awareness Day on 18 November.

The survey calls attention to the huge gaps in public knowledge with respect to antibiotics. 40 percent of the respondents believed that antibiotics can treat viral infections, 26 percent believed they can treat fungal infections, four percent thought they can treat asthma and another four percent thought they can treat hay fever. 17 percent of the respondents believed that antibiotics can be used as anti-inflammatories. Half of the respondents believed that antibiotics can weaken your immune system.

One finding that is cause for concern is that approximately 40 percent of respondents between the ages of 15 and 24 reported taking antibiotics that were not prescribed to them. Only 10 percent of respondents over 25 years of age revealed the same. This trend could further contribute to the ever-growing problem of antimicrobial resistance.

“The misconception that antibiotics are a cure-all for all ills is proving to be a very difficult myth to shift,” said Clodna McNulty, head of PHE’s primary care unit, stressing that the results “highlight the need for much greater awareness raising as to what antibiotics are, and what conditions they can be used for”.

Dame Sally Davies, Chief Medical Officer, warns that antibiotic use needs to be preserved. Otherwise, we could soon see the end of modern medicine as we know it. She highlights the need for GPs to prescribe more appropriately and for patients to be more aware of when antibiotics are actually needed. She also noted that the European Antibiotic Awareness Day is an excellent opportunity to raise awareness about antibiotic use and resistance.

Antibiotic resistance is a serious issue. Nearly 25,000 people die every year in Europe due to antibiotic resistance. In addition, antibiotic resistance has significant financial implications. According to the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control, it is already costing the European Union approximately €1.5 billion a year in healthcare expenses. The toll is even higher when considering lost productivity.

PHE is running an Antibiotic Guardian campaign to make both healthcare professionals and the general public more aware of the issue, and to highlight the need to slow antibiotic resistance by cutting the use of unnecessary antibiotics.

Source: Pharma Times

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Published on : Mon, 24 Nov 2014