
Antibiotic Overuse continued

many that are implicated in *Clostridium difficile*-associated diarrhea. Doctors should then prescribe oral metronidazole, a drug that can treat some anaerobic bacterial infections (sold as Flagyl and numerous other brand names). Careful hand washing with soap and water is recommended for all medical personnel and home caregivers as a supplement to the use of alcohol-based sanitizer because such sanitizers do not eradicate *Clostridium difficile*.

What you can do:

-Do not request antibiotics for a viral illness. Colds, flu, and bronchitis are examples of viral illnesses for which antibiotics are frequently and inappropriately prescribed.

-Wash your hands often. This is the most important means of preventing the spread of infection, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For more information, go to the Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics (www.tufts.edu/apua).

-Seek medical attention for diarrhea lasting longer than three days or accompanied by blood or high fever. This advice from the Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report is based on the fact that outbreaks of *Clostridium difficile*-associated infection have been reported in people previously thought to be at low risk—that is, healthy, young, and not recently hospitalized. Also, diarrhea and pseudomembranous colitis have been observed to begin up to several weeks following cessation of antibiotics therapy, according to Worst Pills, Best Pills, A Consumer's Guide to Avoiding Drug-Induced Death or Illness.

-Rethink the chronic use of heartburn medicines like Nexium, Prilosec, Prevacid, and others in the drug class known as proton pump inhibitors. Use of these drugs, which suppress stomach acid, is linked to a higher incidence of *Clostridium difficile* in non-hospitalized people, according to a study published last month in the Journal of the American Medical Association. Apparently, stomach acid protects against invading pathogens. To a lesser extent, use of another class of heartburn drugs called H2 blockers (Tagamet, Pepcid, Axid, and Zantac) is also linked to an increased risk of *Clostridium difficile*. ±

Antibiotics Implicated In Recent Outbreaks

Nearly all antibiotics can cause pseudomembranous colitis in a small minority of people. Its severity can range from mild to life-threatening. Only the following antibiotic families and clindamycin, however, are implicated in the recent outbreaks of the most virulent *Clostridium difficile*-associated infections.

In their editorial for The New England Journal of Medicine, John G. Barlett, MD, and Trish M. Perl MD, advised doctors to use restraint in the use of second- and third-generation cephalosporins, fluoroquinolones, or a combination of the three:

Fluoroquinolone Antibiotic Family

The family includes Ciprofloxacin, Gatifloxacin, Levofloxacin, Lomefloxacin, Norfloxacin, Ofloxacin, Sparfloxacin, and Trovafloxacin. Each is known by one or more brand names. Ciprofloxacin, for example, is sold under four brand names: Ciloxan, Cipro, Cipro Cystitis Pack, and Cipro HC. The first drug in this family was introduced in 1984.

Cephalosporins Antibiotic Family

Each drug in this family can have one to three different brand names. Some brand names for second- and third-generation cephalosporins include: Vantin, Zinacef, Cefclor, Suprax, Lorabid, Ceftin, and Cefzil. The first drug in this family was introduced in 1974.

Clindamycin

Introduced in 1973, clindamycin has been reserved for life-threatening infections that do not respond to penicillin or other antibiotics. It is sold under the brand names of Cleocin, Cleocin Pediatric, Cleocin T, Cleocin Vaginal Cream, Dalacin C, and Dalacin T. ±

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