

## Director of Public Health

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Dear Parents and Guardians

### Important message to parents from Public Health and the NHS

#### Help keep antibiotics working

Over the winter months, children often get coughs, colds and stomach bugs. They can spread much more easily in the colder months when we spend more time indoors.

Understanding how to manage common illnesses will help you keep your child comfortable and stop germs spreading further. The [NHS website](#) and the [Healthier Together](#) website both give advice for parents about childhood illnesses. It's also important to understand when and why a doctor may prescribe antibiotics for your child and when they may not. Antibiotics are used to treat or prevent some types of infections. They work by killing bacteria or preventing them from spreading. But they do not work for everything, including viruses which cause colds and flu.

If we use antibiotics too often, there is a risk of them not working any more. Antibiotic resistance is a serious global health issue, but there are simple steps parents can take to ensure the safe and appropriate use of antibiotics.

#### What is antibiotic resistance?

Bacteria are becoming increasingly resistant to common antibiotics used to kill them, meaning the antibiotics do not work as well and makes infections much more difficult to treat.

**It is really important that we only take antibiotics when they are needed and take them as prescribed by the GP to help keep antibiotics working for the future.**

#### When are antibiotics necessary?

Antibiotics are designed to treat bacterial infections, such as pneumonia or certain ear infections. However, many common illnesses, including colds, flu, coughs, and most sore throats, are caused by viruses. **Antibiotics do not kill viruses** and using them unnecessarily can lead to antibiotic resistance.

It is important to understand that if your child has a viral illness, antibiotics won't help them get better any faster. If your child is unwell, you should seek advice from your pharmacist or GP as normal. If you are concerned, you should seek advice from your GP practice or 111.

Vaccinations have an important role to play in reducing antibiotic resistance, by preventing illness's and the need for antibiotics. Making sure you and your family are up to date with all maternal, childhood and seasonal vaccinations will help to protect you and your family against potentially serious diseases such as measles, whooping cough, RSV and flu.

## Safe use of antibiotics

If you are prescribed antibiotics for your child, it's important to use them safely:

- **Dispose of leftovers properly:** If there are leftover antibiotics once the course is complete, take them to a pharmacy for safe disposal. Never flush them down the toilet or throw them in the bin. Do not keep them to use in the future.
- **Stick to the prescribed dose and timing:** Give the medication exactly as instructed. Missing doses or not spacing them out correctly can reduce their effectiveness.
- **Don't share antibiotics:** Never use leftover antibiotics or give your child medication that was prescribed for someone else. Different infections require different treatments, and using the wrong antibiotics can contribute to resistance.

This leaflet provides general advice about antibiotics and simple steps parents can take to ensure the safe and appropriate use of antibiotics. [General advice about antibiotics – Medicines For Children](#).

You may also find this leaflet useful if your child develops a cough this winter which provides guidance on when to seek medical advice. [Caring for Children with Coughs](#) (Polar Bear) leaflet.

## For further information:

[Antibiotic resistance - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/antibiotics/)  
[Hertfordshire and West Essex Healthier Together](#)

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/antibiotics/>

Thank you for your help in this important public health matter.

Yours sincerely



**Sarah Perman**  
Director of  
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