

**Alabama joins CDC to spread the message about colds, flu and antibiotics**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

CONTACT: Susan Bland  
(334) 206-5950  
[sbland@adph.state.al.us](mailto:sbland@adph.state.al.us)

The Alabama Department of Public Health Antimicrobial Resistance Program is collaborating with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to help build awareness of the appropriate use of antibiotics.

"Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work" is a national public education campaign to assist Americans become better informed about antibiotic treatment, especially during the cold and flu season.

The campaign's key message is a basic medical fact: antibiotics do not effectively treat colds, flu and other viral illnesses. Antibiotics do not kill viruses, make patients with viral infections feel better, yield a faster recovery, or keep others from getting sick. State and county health departments nationwide are joining forces to promote the campaign through their local communities.

"Recent research tells us that most Alabamians don't understand that antibiotics kill bacteria, not viruses," said Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer. "People go to the doctor expecting to get antibiotics for a sick child or themselves. Many times a prescription for antibiotics is the wrong course of treatment."

Tens of millions of the antibiotics prescribed in doctors' offices are for viral infections that are not treatable with antibiotics. Doctors cite diagnostic uncertainty, time pressure and patient demands as the primary reasons for this over-prescription.

"Antibiotics are powerful drugs that can work wonders when needed for bacterial infections," said Dr. Williamson. "However, patients should not insist on antibiotics when diagnosed with a viral illness, such as a cold or the flu."

Taking antibiotics when they are not needed creates additional health risks. Widespread inappropriate use of antibiotics is fueling an increase in drug-resistant bacteria and threatens widespread drug-resistant illness.

Over the past decade almost every type of bacteria has become less responsive to antibiotic treatment when it is needed. These antibiotic-resistant bacteria can quickly spread through a community, introducing a new strain of infectious disease that is more difficult to cure and more expensive to treat.

Antibiotic resistance is one of the world's most pressing public health problems. Americans of all ages can lower this risk by learning about appropriate antibiotic use and taking antibiotics only when they are needed this cold and flu season.

According to the CDC antibiotic resistance is also a major contributor to the disease, death and costs resulting from hospital-acquired infections. Each year nearly 2 million patients in the United States get an infection as a result of receiving health care in a hospital. These hospital-acquired infections are often difficult to treat because the bacteria and other microorganisms that cause such infections are resistant to at least one of the drugs most commonly used to treat these infections. One report placed the annual cost of anti-microbial resistance among a single pathogen (*Staphylococcus aureus*) at \$122 million.

The health department is working with parents, physicians and infection control nurses statewide to promote the "Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work" campaign. Billboards reminding the public to use antibiotics judiciously are also scheduled to be posted statewide.

10/3/03