

# Antibiotic Overuse Could Cause the Next Global Healthcare Crisis

- European Antibiotic Awareness Day is 18 November

## **WHO's World Antimicrobial Awareness Week 2020 runs 18-24 November**

**November 18, 2020:** With optimism growing for the potential of a COVID-19 vaccine, pharmacists are warning that overuse and misuse of antibiotics could lead to the next global healthcare crisis. The Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU), marking European Antibiotic Awareness Day (18 November) and the start of the WHO's Antimicrobial Awareness Week, has urged all stakeholders to be united in the global effort to preserve the effectiveness of antibiotics. Community pharmacist and IPU President Eoghan Hanly explained the risks, "Antibiotics are vital medicines and have saved countless millions of lives. However, misuse and overuse has led to growing levels of infections that are resistant to commonly prescribed antibiotics." "Antibiotic resistant infections such as MRSA, which were virtually unheard of a few decades ago, are now commonplace in Ireland. Other conditions which were treatable with standard medications, such as TB, are now increasingly becoming resistant to antibiotics. If these infections cannot be treated, they become significantly more dangerous and potentially fatal. "We have spent almost a year reeling from the effects of COVID-19. This has shown us all the profound impacts that can arise when public health is challenged. If resistance to antibiotics is allowed to grow these challenges will become more commonplace. It is everyone's united responsibility to stop this happening. "The most important advice is that antibiotics should only be taken when necessary to treat a diagnosed bacterial infection and when prescribed by a qualified healthcare professional. They must be taken as directed and the full course completed. Anecdotally, we often hear of people who keep partial courses of antibiotics and self-medicate at a later stage without medical advice. This is incredibly foolish and potentially very dangerous." My Hanly concluded by reminding patients that antibiotics have no impact on COVID-19 and have no preventative properties. "If you think you have symptoms of COVID-19 you should not medicate with antibiotics — instead consult your GP immediately. Similarly, antibiotics will do nothing for cold or flu or stomach bugs, but your pharmacist can provide you with advice on treatments that may actually alleviate your symptoms." **Key advice provided by the Irish Pharmacy Union to combat the risks are:**

1. Do not take antibiotics for colds and flu, sore throat, coughs, vomiting or diarrhoea;
2. If you do need to take an antibiotic, take it exactly as prescribed and finish the

- full course even if you are feeling better;
3. Do not save antibiotics for later use or share them with others;
  4. Don't expect to be prescribed antibiotics for viral conditions; and
  5. Avail of vaccines for conditions such as the flu, pneumococcal disease and shingles at your local pharmacy.

**ENDS**