Pharmacists: Antibiotic Overuse is a Growing Threat to Global Health



European Antibiotic Awareness Day is the 18th of November

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

Thursday 17 November 2022: Antibiotic overuse is becoming an increasing concern and a growing threat to Irish and global health according to the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU). Marking European Antibiotic Awareness Day (18 November) and the start of the World Health Organisations Antimicrobial Awareness Week, the IPU has urged everyone to respect antibiotics and to ensure they are only ever used when absolutely necessary to support the global effort to preserve their effectiveness.

IPU President Dermot Twomey warned, "Antibiotics have been one of the most significant developments in the history of medicine and have saved countless lives in the past hundred years. We must protect their potential, but the growing prevalence of antibiotic overuse poses a risk with the growth of antibiotic resistance and the growing number of highly resistant superbugs (bacteria that are hard to kill with antibiotics), of major concern."

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“Antibiotic resistance will present a major issue for both Irish and global healthcare systems if we continue to overuse antibiotics for ailments of which it is not appropriate to do so. We can already see the negative effects of antibiotic overuse in play today. Antibiotic resistant infections such as MRSA and C. diff have presented a huge challenge to the global health community, and there is certainly a fear that new strains of bacteria may emerge that cannot be treated by existing antibiotics.”

“We all have a responsibility to attempt to prevent these new strains of bacteria emerging and that is why this year’s theme of “preventing antimicrobial resistance together” is so relevant. The key message is that antibiotics should only ever be taken when a patient actually requires them to treat a specific bacterial infection. For many common conditions, such as the flu, coughs, colds, vomiting and diarrhoea, antibiotics have no impact. Similarly, COVID-19, which is a viral infection will not be impacted by antibiotic treatments. Instead, those suffering from these ailments should speak to their pharmacist or GP for remedies to treat the symptoms.”

In conclusion, Mr Twomey said that European Antibiotic Awareness Day offers a valuable focus for us all on this critical healthcare issue, and he outlined a series of pieces of advice that pharmacists all over the country will be continuing to emphasise to patients this week:

- Do not take antibiotics for colds and flu; coughs, vomiting and diarrhoea.
- If you do need to take an antibiotic, take it exactly as prescribed and finish the full course even if you are feeling better.
- Do not save antibiotics for later use or share them with others.
- Avail of vaccines for conditions such as the Flu, pneumococcal disease, and shingles at your local pharmacy.

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