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Health Officials Ask Kansans to Help Safeguard Antibiotics

U.S. Antibiotic Awareness Week, November 13-19, 2017

TOPEKA, Kan. – State and federal health officials are raising public awareness of the need to safeguard the effectiveness of antibiotics. Nov. 13-19, is “U.S. Antibiotic Awareness Week”. Led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), this one-week observance is intended to raise awareness across the U.S. of antibiotic resistance and the importance of appropriate antibiotic prescribing and use.

Since 2013, the CDC and the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) have recognized a threat to antibiotic resistance and have begun working with many partners across the state and nation to improve antibiotic stewardship in communities, in health care facilities, as well as on the farm. KDHE’s Healthcare-Associated Infections and Antimicrobial Resistance Program is now implementing a comprehensive platform statewide.

State health officials are calling on the general public, health care providers, health care facility administrators, food producers and policy makers to help in this effort.

In Kansas, a broad range of individuals, professionals and organizations are working together to adopt best practices to help stem the inappropriate use of antibiotics. A statewide advisory group is assisting KDHE in spearheading this effort.

According to data from the CDC, the total number of antibiotic prescriptions written in Kansas ranked among the highest nationally. In 2015, more than 900 antibiotic prescriptions were written per 1,000 individuals statewide.

Antibiotic awareness does not mean stopping the use of antibiotics; it means changing the way antibiotics are prescribed and used today – when necessary and appropriate.

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Since the 1940s, antibiotics have been used to treat patients who have infections, greatly reducing the number of related illnesses and deaths. But now, more than 75 years later, antibiotics have been used so widely and for so long that the infectious organisms the antibiotics are designed to kill have adapted to them, making the drugs less effective, according to the CDC.

The CDC finds that more than one-third of all antibiotics used in the United States are either unnecessary or the antibiotic does not match the germ. Antibiotics are *not* needed, for example, for viruses, such as colds, most sore throats, and many sinus infections.

Especially during the cold and flu season when viruses are prevalent, the public can do their part by recognizing that antibiotics are likely not the right medicine. Antibiotics can fight infections and save lives when used to fight the right germ, at the right time, and for the right duration.

More than two million people in the United States get infections that are resistant to antibiotics, and each year at least 23,000 people die as a result. If drug-resistant germs keep growing and if we lose the effectiveness of antibiotics, we may also lose our ability to treat patients who need them.

Here are ways you can help:

- Ask if tests will be done to make sure the right antibiotic is prescribed.
- Only take antibiotics prescribed for you; do not share or use leftover antibiotics. Antibiotics treat specific types of infections. Taking the wrong medicine may delay correct treatment and allow bacteria to multiply.
- Do not save antibiotics for the next illness. Discard any leftover medication once the prescribed course of treatment is completed.
- Antibiotics may have side effects. When your doctors says you do not need an antibiotic, taking one may do more harm than good.
- Consult your doctor if any questions arise.

To learn more about antibiotic resistance and U.S. Antibiotic Awareness Week, visit the CDC website at <https://www.cdc.gov/antibiotic-use/week/overview.html>.

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KDHE's mission is to protect and improve the health and environment of all Kansans.