



# Grandparents Corner

October 2014

## Get Smart - Know When Antibiotics Work

Are you aware that colds, flu, most sore throats, and bronchitis are caused by viruses? Did you know that antibiotics do not help fight viruses? It's true. Plus, taking antibiotics when you have a virus may do more harm than good. Taking antibiotics when they are not needed increases your risk of getting an infection later that resists antibiotic treatment.

When you use antibiotics appropriately, you do the best for your health, your family's health, and the health of those around you.

Below are six simple and smart facts about antibiotic use:

1. Antibiotics are life-saving drugs. Using antibiotics wisely is the best way to preserve their strength for future bacterial illnesses.
2. Antibiotics only treat bacterial infections. If your child has a viral infection like a cold, talk to a physician or pharmacist about symptom relief. This may include over-the-counter medicine, a humidifier, or warm liquids.
3. Some ear infections DO NOT require an antibiotic. A doctor can determine what kind of ear infection your child has and if antibiotics will help. The doctor may follow expert guidelines to wait a couple of days before prescribing antibiotics since your child may become better without them.
4. Most sore throats DO NOT require an antibiotic. Only 1 in 5 children seen by a doctor for a sore throat has strep throat, which should be treated with an antibiotic. Your child's physician can only confirm strep throat by running a test.
5. Green colored mucus is not a sign that an antibiotic is needed. As the body's immune system fights off an infection, mucus can change color. This is normal and does not mean your child needs an antibiotic.
6. There are potential risks when taking any prescription drug. Antibiotics use can cause complications, ranging from an upset stomach to a serious allergic reaction. Your child's physician will weigh the risks and benefits before prescribing an antibiotic.

Viruses cause common illnesses that antibiotics CANNOT treat like:

- Colds
- Influenza (the flu)
- Runny noses
- Most coughs
- Most bronchitis
- Most sore throats
- Most sinus infections
- Some ear infections

REMEMBER: The best defense against infections - FREQUENT and PROPER HAND WASHING!

Source: CDC - Centers for Disease Control - [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

The majority of germs are either harmless or good for us. A doorknob harbors microbes (germs) that you are likely to touch and transfer to your nose and mouth, common gateways for germs to enter the body and make you sick. In this issue, we focus on the tiny minority of germs that can harm. Answer True or False to the questions below.

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1. *Frequent hand washing with soap and water is the best way to fight infection.*  
T F
2. *Proper hand washing requires rubbing both hands with soap and water to break down the grease and dirt that carry germs.* T F
3. *Superbugs, microorganisms that have developed resistance to antibiotics, are difficult to treat, especially for people who have a weakened immune system.*  
T F
4. *Microorganisms are often transmitted by direct contact, indirect contact, through food, and through the respiratory route.* T F
5. *Germs can linger in the air after one sneezes or coughs and stay for days on various surfaces in the home.* T F
6. *Catching your foot as you walk is not a sign that you need to stop and rest.* T F
7. *You can infect yourself by touching your nose or mouth with contaminated hands.*  
T F
8. *Sharing utensils, glasses and towels will not spread germs.* T F
9. *Our bodies have only bad germs.* T F
10. *Clostridium difficile (C. diff), a bacterium that causes severe diarrhea, and methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), can lead to life-threatening infections.* T F

**KEY:** 1. T 2. T 3. T 4. T 5. T 6. F 7. T 8. F 9. F 10. T