



Antibiotics include a range of powerful drugs that kill bacteria or slow their growth.

Picture: <https://www.hospimedica.com>

The fight against antibiotic resistance

Drug awareness

MEDICATION used to fight against bacteria is called an antibiotic.

At any point in our lives from birth until now, we might have been given antibiotic, be it in form of topical powder or ointment, oral pills and injections.

Antibiotics are used to save lives.

Antibiotics were discovered long before we were born. They were found in natural forms and some still prefer to continue using this medicine in its pure form.

Ongoing science made this medicine marketable. Thus, it was available globally which improved efficacy of health services locally and privately.

Can we imagine a world without antibiotics (natural or manufactured) at all?

That being said, it does not necessitate it should be given to all, with any illness.

The growing concern is of antimicrobial resistance which according to the World Health Organization's definition is a microorganism's resistance to an antimicrobial drug or medicines that once was able to treat an infection by that microorganism.

WHO in 2014 recognised antimicrobial resistance as a serious health threat.

It can affect anyone of all age groups and it has become a global concern.

Why is it a global concern?

Simply because the once commonly treatable illnesses like pneumonia, diarrhoea, gonorrhoea, soft tissue infections, urinary tract infections are becoming challenging when they no longer resolve as quickly and effectively as before with the current recommended antibiotics.

This has negative impact:

1. Longer hospital stays as it is taking longer to get better. If stay longer in hospital, there is also risk to developing hospital acquired infections;

2. More frequent visits to health care facility if outpatient so becomes financial burden and time consuming;

3. Poor or non-compliance with antibiotics which leads to more antibiotic resistance.

4. Depression;

5. Localised infection in body if unsuccessfully treated can spread to other organ systems increasing morbidity; and

6. Death especially in the very young or elderly or those with multiple medical conditions, or those who are immunocompromised or immune-suppressed, or those with a bacterial illness that is resistant to all available antibiotics, or those in areas without these alternative antibiotics or cannot afford it.

How can we avoid spread of antibiotic resistant bacteria?

1. By being a responsible consumer in using antibiotics as prescribed when needed. It also means completing the course of medication even when you feel better. Also if you have any side-effects or doubts about prescribed medications, please see health care provider as soon as possible;

Use one cutting board to prepare raw meats, and another for foods that will not be cooked before they're eaten such as salad. Don't put cooked meat on a plate that had raw meat on it.

~ Dr Mabel Fong

2. Do not take antibiotics if it is not needed — this can be discussed with your health care provider accordingly;

3. Avoid sharing antibiotics with others who are ill must seek medical attention. Not everyone is the same and they may have different response to medication;

4. Avoid using leftover prescriptions; and

5. Ensure food safety by using simple clean, separate, cook and chill practices as depicted by picture below.

Clean — wash your hands, utensils and kitchen surfaces before, while and after preparing food.

Separate — germs from raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs can spread to fruits, vegetables, and other ready-to-eat foods unless you keep them separate.

Use one cutting board to prepare raw meats, and another for foods that will not be cooked before they're eaten such as salad.

Don't put cooked meat on a plate that had raw meat on it.

Cook — Use a food thermometer to ensure that foods are cooked to a safe internal temperature: 145°F for whole cuts of beef, pork, lamb, and veal, such as steaks, chops, and roasts, 160°F for ground red meats, and 165°F for poultry, including ground chicken and turkey.

Chill — keep your refrigerator below 40°F and refrigerate foods within two hours of cooking (refrigerate within one hour if the outdoor temperature is above 90°F).

Wash your hands after touching pets or other animals or their food, water, poop, belongings (such as toys and bowls), or habitats (such as beds, cages, tanks, coops, stalls, and barns).

Do not drink raw milk.

Don't prepare food for others if you have diarrhoea or are vomiting.

Be especially careful preparing food for children, pregnant women, those in poor health, and older adults.

Report suspected illness from food to your local health authority.

Follow CDC's Traveller's Health recommendations for food and water safety when travelling internationally.

How we can get antibiotic resistance through animals?

Animals carry bacteria in their guts just as people do. Some of these bacteria may be antibiotic resistant. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria can get in food in several ways:

□ They can spread to meat and poultry when animals are slaughtered and processed;

□ Animal waste (poop) can contain resistant bacteria and get into the surrounding environment; and

□ Fruits and vegetables can get contaminated through contact with soil, water, or fertiliser that contains animal waste.

Measures implemented in Fiji for Antimicrobial Resistance Description: RSS

There is no legal restriction for use of natural forms of antibiotics like some of natural herbs in Fiji.

However, there are regulatory policies governing use of manufactured forms of antibiotics worldwide in health systems.

In November 2015, Fiji became the first Pacific Island to take the initiative and launch a national plan for antimicrobial resistance with World Antibiotic Awareness week designated for the month of November.

Fiji's National AMR Committee (NARC), comprised of multi-agency members, across sectors, is a stepping stone to effectively implement the aspirations of the National Action Plan.

The NARC has been incorporated as a sub-committee of the Fiji Medicinal Products Board under the Medicinal Products Act, with the objective being to protect the health and safety of the public by regulating medicinal products, devices, poisons and similar products.

The National Action Plan on antimicrobial resistance will be reviewed every three years or more frequently if necessary.

Conclusion

Antibiotic resistance is deadly especially in our present setting of a developing Pacific Island country with limited resources and in this challenging time of COVID-19.

We all have a responsibility to help minimise this threat. By being empowered with this awareness and through the national antimicrobial resistance committee monitoring this threat and taking actions accordingly, we can hope for a better future.

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