



## What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics are important medicines used to treat infections caused by bacteria. Antibiotics DO NOT treat infections caused by viruses.

## What are viral infections?

Viral infections are very common. They include all colds and flu, and many infections of the nose, sinuses, ears, throat and chest (coughs/bronchitis).

## Why should antibiotics NOT be used to treat viral infections?

- Antibiotics DO NOT kill viruses.
- Taking antibiotics that you do not need, e.g. to treat viral infections can lead to antibiotic resistance.
- Resistance occurs when bacteria are no longer killed by antibiotics. As a result some antibiotics have become less effective against the bacterial infections they were designed to treat.
- Infections caused by resistant bacteria can be very difficult to treat.
- In recent years few new antibiotics have been discovered. We need to protect the antibiotics we have, to ensure they continue to work now and in the future.

## How long does it take to get better?

Here are a few guidelines to help you judge how long some common illnesses and symptoms should last for:

Common illnesses	Most people are better by
Earache (middle ear infection)	8 days
Sore throat	7–8 days
Sinusitis (adults only)	14–21 days
Cold	14 days
Cough or bronchitis	21 days

## How can antibiotic resistance be avoided?

You can help to avoid antibiotic resistance by only taking antibiotics when you really need them and when they have been recommended for you by a healthcare professional.

If you are prescribed an antibiotic, follow the directions for use carefully and always remember to complete the full recommended course.

Antibiotics may cause side-effects such as thrush, diarrhoea, rash and stomach upset. They can also cause allergic reactions, which may occasionally be severe. It is important to discuss all antibiotic treatments fully with your healthcare professional.

**Become an Antibiotic Guardian video (click the image below):**



# ANTIBIOTIC GUARDIAN

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## European Antibiotic Awareness Day

European Antibiotic Awareness Day takes place each year on 18 November to raise awareness about antibiotic resistance and to highlight the correct use of antibiotics.

To mark Antibiotic Awareness Day, members of the public and healthcare professionals are encouraged to become an Antibiotic Guardian to fight the overuse or incorrect use of antibiotics. To sign up to become an Antibiotic Guardian visit [www.antibioticguardian.com](http://www.antibioticguardian.com)

Information on antibiotic use is available [here](#) along with advice on self-care if you have common cold and flu-like symptoms, sore throat, cough and sore ear.

For health professionals, guidance on prescribing antibiotics can be found [here](#) along with further information on antimicrobial resistance and healthcare associated infections [here](#). Antimicrobial stewardship recourses for primary care staff can be found [here](#).

For anyone wanting to share messages of support on social media or to encourage others to become an Antibiotic Guardian, keep informed on the PHA's Twitter and Facebook pages - [www.twitter.com/publichealthni](http://www.twitter.com/publichealthni) and [www.facebook.com/publichealthagency](http://www.facebook.com/publichealthagency)

For the Antibiotic Guardian social media toolkit and quizzes, click [here](#)

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