

# Antibiotics: Know when to use them



## Antibiotics may NOT always be the answer to treat you or your child.

### What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics are a type of medicine that can treat certain infections caused by bacteria. Antibiotics do not work against viruses, such as those which cause bronchitis, colds, the flu, or runny noses. That's why your doctor may not always order antibiotics when you are sick.

Your doctor can tell what kind of infection is making you or your child sick and give advice about how to treat it.



### Viruses or Bacteria?

What's got you sick?

Common Infections	Common Cause	Are Antibiotics Needed?
Cold/runny nose/upper respiratory infection	Virus	No
Sore throat (except strep)	Virus	No
COVID-19	Virus	No
Flu	Virus	No
Bronchitis/Chest Cold	Virus	No
Ear infection	Virus or bacteria	Maybe
Sinus infection	Virus or bacteria	Maybe
Strep throat	Bacteria	Yes

Source: CDC - Adapted from "Be Antibiotics Aware"

### Did you know?

In children, a reaction to antibiotics is the most common cause of ER visits related to medicines.

### If your doctor orders antibiotics:

Make sure you take your medicine the way your doctor tells you. Talk to your doctor about side effects or allergic reactions. These may include:

- Rash
- Dizziness
- Diarrhea
- Nausea

Get medical care right away if you have severe diarrhea or allergic reactions like hives, breathing problems, or a feeling like your throat is closing.

Are you insisting on antibiotics? Talk to your doctor about the best way for you or your child to get better. Taking antibiotics when you don't need them could cause more harm than good.



### Get advice from a nurse:

Call our  
**24-Hour Nurse Advice Line** at  
**1-888-244-4347** or  
**TTY 711**

### Questions about benefits?

Give us a call at  
**1-800-440-IEHP (4347),**  
**TTY 1-800-718-4347**  
M-F, 7am-7pm, and  
Sat-Sun, 8am-5pm.