FACT SHEET ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE

What is Antibiotic resistance?
Bacteria are tiny organisms not visible with the human eye. Most bacteria are helpful to us; some are harmful and cause infections. An antibiotic is a prescription drug that can kill or disable disease-causing bacteria.

Antibiotic resistance happens when microbes (germs) develop ways to survive the use of medicines meant to kill or weaken them. There are many bacteria that have developed resistance to antibiotics used to treat the infections caused by them. Some of the more common bacteria that are sometimes resistant are *Staphylococcus aureus* ("Staph"), *Streptococcus pneumoniae* ("pneumococcus"), *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* ("TB"), and *Enterococcus*.

Why have antibiotic resistant bacteria developed?
When antibiotics are used too much, the few bacteria able to survive do so and multiply, eventually making the antibiotic useless. Also, when medicines are prescribed for an illness and people do not take all of the medication, this will allow the bacteria to regroup into different or resistant strains. Thus, the antibiotic cannot kill the bacteria, and these "resistant" bacteria can spread.

When do I take antibiotics?
Your doctor gives you a prescription for antibiotics when bacteria cause your illness.

Does that mean I should take antibiotics for the flu or common cold?
No. "Colds" and "flus" are caused by viruses, not by bacteria. Antibiotics do not work against viruses.

If I cannot take an antibiotic for a viral infection, like a cold, flu, or bronchitis what can I do to feel better?
Get extra sleep, drink lots of fluids, and eat healthy foods. This helps your body fight viral infections. Over-the-counter medicines like throat lozenges or saline nose spray may help you feel better while your body is fighting the virus.

What if I get sick with an infection caused by bacteria that is antibiotic-resistant?
Antibiotic-resistant bacterial infections require stronger medicines, are more difficult to treat, and could require a hospital stay. More serious infections of the blood or brain caused by a bacteria that is resistant to antibiotics can be life threatening.

What can I do to prevent antibiotic-resistant infection?
- Never ask for or take an antibiotic for a viral infection such as cold, cough, or flu.
- Use antibiotics only when your doctor prescribes them.
- Take antibiotics as directed and take all of them, even though you may begin to feel better before you finish all the pills.
- Never take leftover antibiotics or take a prescription that was used by someone else.
- Always wash your hands thoroughly, (using soap and water, for 15 seconds) after blowing your nose, using the toilet, diapering, and before eating or preparing food.