

REACH Notes

Recent Developments to Promote Judicious Antibiotic Prescribing

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PARENTAL MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT RESPIRATORY ILLNESS AND ANTIBIOTICS IN MASSACHUSETTS

We all see parents who misunderstand the need for an antibiotic in a specific illness. The REACH Mass project believes it is helpful to understand the most prevalent misconceptions among our own communities. We surveyed 1090 families in the 16 communities of our study. Here are some results:

- 24% did not know that cold, cough and flu illnesses are caused by viruses (and not bacteria).
- 34% believed that antibiotics are helpful for treating both viral and bacterial illnesses.
- 92% believed that antibiotics are, at least sometimes, needed for treatment of deep cough or bronchitis.
- CDC and others stress that cough illness, in the absence of pneumonia and sinusitis, is almost always viral in origin, and should not be treated with antibiotics.¹
- 88% believed that antibiotics are, at least sometimes, needed for treatment of green nasal discharge.
- The color of nasal discharge is not predictive of bacterial infection. Duration and severity of symptoms are included in criteria for the diagnosis of sinusitis.²

THE GOOD NEWS:

- 70% reported receiving some information regarding antibiotic resistance, though not necessarily from their doctor or nurse.
- Only 4% reported receiving an antibiotic over the phone without an office visit.

These data, while preliminary, confirm the need to continue to educate families about mild illnesses, and the appropriate use of antibiotics. Specific misunderstandings (such as green nasal discharge signifying bacterial infection) are important to dispel. REACH Mass is undertaking community education on a number of these issues, but clinicians and office staff are the most important educators!

1. O'Brien KL, Dowell SF, Schwartz B, Marcy SM, Phillips WR, Gerber MA. Cough illness/bronchitis-principles of judicious use of antimicrobial agents. *Pediatrics* 1998; 101:178-181.

2. American Academy of Pediatrics. Clinical practice guideline: management of sinusitis. *Pediatrics* 2001; 108:798-808.