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### **"Get Smart about Antibiotics" week: October 5-11, 2009**

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This year, October means fall colors, football and flu shots. The H1N1 pandemic has everyone concerned about getting sick, and it's the perfect time to caution people against the overuse of antibiotics and antivirals. On Monday Oct. 5, Oregon Public Health kicks off "Get Smart about Antibiotics," a week of educational efforts designed to inform the public about how overusing antiviral and antibiotic drugs can leave us without an effective drug when it's needed.

"With the recent pandemic of H1N1 flu, it's now more important than ever that we caution patients against unnecessary use or overuse of antibiotics and antivirals," says Ann Thomas, M.D., medical director of the Oregon Alliance Working for Antibiotic Resistance Education (AWARE).

Oregon AWARE, part of Oregon Public Health's Office of Disease Prevention and Epidemiology, is a statewide coalition promoting the appropriate use of antibiotics. AWARE is asking health care providers and pharmacists to distribute educational materials on overusing antibiotics and antivirals to their patients. They feel that it's particularly important to convey the message that antibiotics are not effective in treating viral infections such as the common cold or the flu.

"If we overuse antibiotics and antivirals now," says Thomas, "we won't have an effective drug when we really need it."

(more)

AWARE will also use "Get Smart" week to launch a public service media campaign to promote the appropriate use of antibiotics and reduce the problem of antibiotic-resistant bacteria in Oregon. The campaign will include billboards, radio announcements, pharmacy bag stuffers and educational booths at community venues.

AWARE's "Get Smart" coincides with the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) "Get Smart" week, an annual observance of the importance of appropriate antibiotic use. This year extra effort will be placed on reminding people that antibiotics will not cure a cold or the flu, either seasonal or H1N1. "With the extra challenge of an H1N1 flu pandemic, it is more important than ever that patients and parents know that antibiotics do not treat flu," says Lauri Hicks, M.D., medical director of CDC's Get Smart: Know When Antibiotics Work program.

In rare cases, antiviral drugs such as Tamiflu® and Relenza® may be prescribed to work against the flu by preventing flu viruses from reproducing in one's body. They are recommended only for people who are at increased risk for complications from flu, or who are sick enough to be hospitalized. However, antivirals are not a "magic bullet." It is impractical to take antivirals to prevent getting the flu because an individual would have to take them constantly and they are expensive. Also, the misuse of antivirals can lead to the development of flu viruses that can't be treated.

AWARE wants to the public to know these things about antibiotic use:

- Never take antibiotics to treat viral illnesses like colds or flu -- they have no effect against viruses.
- Taking antibiotics when they're not needed helps resistant bacteria grow. When bacteria become resistant, the antibiotics that once combated them are no longer effective.
- When you are prescribed an antibiotic, take every dose, even if your symptoms go away. Never share your antibiotics.
- Using antibiotics wisely will help slow the spread of resistant bacteria. This will help keep our lifesaving antibiotics effective for years to come.

Educational and promotional materials are available in electronic format from [www.healthoregon.org/antibiotics](http://www.healthoregon.org/antibiotics) or in bulk by calling the AWARE office at 971-673-1100.

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