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Health Community Bands Together to Launch Utah AWARE To Combat Antibiotic Resistance

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Today doctors, pharmacists, health officials, health plans and pharmaceutical companies joined forces to kick-off “Utah AWARE,” a public education campaign which stands for Utah Alliance Working for Antibiotic Resistance Education. The Alliance hopes to prevent the increasing resistance of bacteria to antibiotics through community education about appropriate antibiotic use.

Twenty-two* health companies and agencies are combining resources to address the serious health concern of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. This partnership will work to educate patients, parents, and physicians that antibiotics should be reserved for bacterial infections, and not prescribed for viral infections. Antibiotics do not help reduce the severity or duration of chest colds or influenza. “Utah AWARE’s goal is to meet the needs of our state’s population and help ensure that antibiotics will continue to be effective for future generations,” said Eric Cannon, PharmD, Intermountain Health Care, Chairperson, Utah AWARE. A media campaign is slated to run throughout the winter, which is the season of the most antibiotic overuse. The radio ads feature Dick Van Dyke and Bill Nye the Science Guy.

Taking antibiotics when they aren’t needed can be harmful to your health. Resistant bacteria are those bacteria not killed by usual doses of antibiotics and emerge because of antibiotic overuse or misuse. “Once bacteria develop resistance to an antibiotic, they can continue to live and/or multiply even in the presence of antibiotic treatment. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria are an increasingly serious problem throughout the world and in Utah. Doctors and patients need to do our part to make sure antibiotics remain an effective treatment tool,” Robert Rolfs, State Epidemiologist, Utah Department of Health.

“Nationwide, bacteria are becoming increasingly resistant to common antibiotics. This means that the drugs that are used to kill bacteria are not working as well as they used to...here in Utah and all over the world,” said Dr. Merle Sande, Professor at the University of Utah School of Medicine. “This has resulted because we have misused antibiotics by prescribing them for viral infections such as bronchitis where they don't do any good! We hope that with programs like this that the message will get out and we will use antibiotics judiciously and only for infections where they help!”

According to the Center's for Disease Control, up to 50 percent of antibiotic use may be inappropriate. “Studies have shown that most of this inappropriate use is for illness due to viruses against which antibiotics are ineffective,” says Dr. Kim Bateman, HealthInsight. “Antibiotic resistant bacteria cause infections that are more difficult to treat, result in longer and costlier hospitalizations, and must be treated with stronger antibiotics that may cause more serious side effects.”

Antibiotic resistance has dramatically increased in recent years, particularly for certain bacteria. One of the most common bacterial infections in children and adults is caused by *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. In the late 1980s, less than 5 percent of the cases of *Streptococcus pneumoniae* in the U.S. demonstrated partial or complete resistance to penicillin. In 1994 a follow-up U.S. survey found that 24 percent of *Streptococcus pneumoniae* exhibited penicillin resistance and by 1999-2000, 34 percent were resistant.

In a 1999 Utah study, 25 percent of *Streptococcus pneumoniae* isolated from children were resistant to the antibiotic penicillin. During 2000-2001, penicillin resistance had increased to 30-35 percent. In addition, 50 percent of the pneumococci bacteria were resistant to at least one antibiotic tested.

A parent survey conducted in Wisconsin in 1999 showed that nearly a third of those surveyed thought antibiotics were needed for a cold, cough, or sore throat that was not caused by bacteria. So why do patients think antibiotics will help? Researchers have

found that one of the strongest predictors of patients expecting antibiotic treatment is whether they had them previously prescribed for the same illness.

Utah Medicaid spent well over 7 million dollars on antibiotics in 2000. Medicaid pharmacy and claims data were examined to determine how often antibiotics were prescribed in Utah for a variety of respiratory illnesses. For nearly every diagnosis category examined prescriptions exceeded what is considered appropriate. If it is assumed that antibiotics cost \$40 on average (and many cost much more than that), the money wasted on these antibiotics was more than \$300,000. If similar patterns are seen across all of Utah's patient population, it is estimated that \$12,679,545 was spent on unnecessary antibiotic prescriptions in 2000 alone.

How can you prevent antibiotic-resistant infections?

- Talk with your health care provider about antibiotic resistance.
- Ask whether an antibiotic is likely to be beneficial for your illness.
- Ask what else you can do to feel better sooner.
- Do not take an antibiotic for a viral infection like a cold or the flu.
- Do not save some of your antibiotic for the next time you get sick.
- Take an antibiotic exactly as the doctor tells you.
- Do not take an antibiotic that is prescribed for someone else.

For more information, visit www.utahaware.com.

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