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12th January 2023

Circular 007/23

RE: Advice and Updates on Antibiotic Supply

Dear Doctor,

Please find attached communication issued from Dr Una Fallon, Chair of HSE Incident Management Team for Group A Strep in relation to managing respiratory infections during the 2023 winter season, including advice and updates on antibiotic supply.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Shaun Flanagan'.

Shaun Flanagan
Assistant National Director
Primary Care Reimbursement Service



Memo

To: Prescribers, Pharmacists, Consultant Microbiologists, Infectious Diseases Physicians, Antimicrobial Pharmacists, Consultants in Public Health Medicine

From: Dr Una Fallon
Chair of HSE Incident Management Team for Group A Strep
National Clinical Lead Acute Operations Response,
Office of the National Clinical Director for Health Protection.

Date: 12/01/2023

Subject: Managing respiratory infections during the 2023 winter season, includes advice and updates on antibiotic supply

Ref: 3 pages

Dear Colleagues,

As we continue through these challenging weeks in delivering healthcare for patients with respiratory infections I would like to acknowledge the ongoing hard work of all prescribers and dispensers particularly GPs and Pharmacists.

To facilitate timely communication of advice on managing the current respiratory infections and updates regarding antibiotic supply a new [webpage](#) entitled “Respiratory infections in the 2023 winter season: advice & updates on antibiotic supply” has been created on www.antibioticprescribing.ie . The information on this webpage will be updated regularly.

There is a link to the page from the main home page of www.antibioticprescribing.ie



The advice on the webpage supplements current antimicrobial prescribing guidelines provided by the HSE for [upper respiratory infections](#) & [lower respiratory infections](#).

I would like to bring to your attention some key points from the information on this new [webpage](#) that will help to maximise the availability of antibiotics for those patients most likely to benefit from their use:



Antibiotics may not be needed

- For self-limiting and likely viral infections, advise patients to use www.undertheweather.ie for advice on self-management.
- National antibiotic prescribing guidelines on www.antibioticprescribing.ie include expert advice for each condition and, where applicable, it indicates when an antibiotic is unlikely to impact the course of an infection and therefore not likely to be needed.

Delayed prescriptions

- Use delayed prescriptions where applicable to protect antibiotic supply.
- GPs and Pharmacists should encourage the patient not to fill the prescription until the appropriate triggers for antibiotic need have occurred.

If an antibiotic is required:

Use of tablets/capsules for some children

- Consider where possible using tablets/capsules for some children in order to prioritise liquid formulations for the very young.
- Consider rounding doses to the nearest capsule/tablet strength to facilitate administration of capsules/tablets.
- For further guidance on helping children to swallow capsules/tablets consult the NHS [Kidzmed leaflet](#).

Duration of treatment

- For the recommended duration of antibiotic treatment, follow guidance for individual conditions on www.antibioticprescribing.ie for [upper respiratory infections](#) or [lower respiratory infections](#)

Liaise with local community pharmacies

- Prescribers please liaise with local community pharmacies to confirm which of the recommended antibiotics are available for prescribing. Include alternative antibiotic options on the prescription if necessary.

The webpage includes the current supply status, at distributor level, of the most commonly used antibiotics for respiratory infections. This information will be updated regularly. Where a product is not listed as a shortage, availability may differ across wholesale supply therefore a pharmacist may be required to check other distributors.



We are working closely with HSE Communications to convey the following important messages to the public:

- *There has been a high demand for antibiotics during the last few weeks.*
- *There are some supply issues with some antibiotics including some liquid formulations. However new supplies are continuously becoming available.*
- *There are enough antibiotics in the system and if you need antibiotics you will receive them.*
- *The HSE is liaising closely with the HPRA and the situation is being carefully managed.*
- *GPs and pharmacists are being actively advised, with daily updates on what is available and on prescribing appropriate alternatives if needed. For instance;*
 - *Generic prescribing allows the pharmacist to dispense from a range of brands of the same antibiotic*
 - *Prescribers can write the antibiotic of choice and an alternative if the first isn't available*
 - *Rounding of doses to the nearest tablet for older children is advised*
 - *Guidance on adhering to the duration of treatment has been provided*
 - *Guidance on how to help children swallow tablets has been provided and is good practice*
- *Stay at home if unwell and get your vaccines when they are due, as this is the best way for us all to stay well.*
- *Please bear in mind that the majority of infections circulating are viral and antibiotics do not work for viral infections*
- *Visit www.undertheweather.ie for advice on self-management of these viral and self-limiting infections.*
- *If your doctor gives you a delayed prescription for an antibiotic, do not fill the prescription until you have decided that you need to take it.*

Thank you again for your support during this challenging time. Any further updates will be shared on the new [webpage](#).

Dr Una Fallon

Chair of the HSE Incident Management Team for Group A Strep.