

Viral and Bacterial Infections and the Use of Antibiotics

- Tanya Vreeke, D.O.



When we get a cough, sore throat and fever, and all the other uncomfortable associated symptoms, it would be nice to just take a pill that would make us feel better. If only it were that easy! First it is necessary to determine whether the infection is viral or bacterial, which can be done by your health care provider.

The common cold and chickenpox are examples of ***viral infections***. Many viruses are spread through body fluids and some travel through the air. Most viral infections just have to run their course, and taking an antibiotic will not help. In fact, it is important not to misuse antibiotics as the germs that make you sick may develop drug resistance. Once antibiotics can no longer kill the germs, even minor infections may become life threatening. Your health care provider will determine the need for antibiotics based on symptoms, physical examination, and/or lab tests. Over-the-counter remedies may be recommended to help ease discomfort until the virus runs its course.

However, a viral illness may lead to a bacterial illness. If the symptoms of a viral illness get worse and will not go away, your health care provider may need to reassess your symptoms and decide if antibiotics are needed.

Bacterial infections may be treated differently than viral infections. Bacteria can live almost anywhere, on anything we touch and on our hands. Most common bacterial infections require treatment with antibiotics. It is important for your health care provider to determine the need for antibiotics. It is also important to take the full course of prescribed antibiotics and not to stop taking them when you start feeling better.

We can all help prevent resistant bacteria by learning the difference between bacterial and viral infections, talking to our health care provider about them, and understanding that antibiotics should not be used for viral infections. It is also recommended to prevent the spread of infections by frequent hand washing and personal cleanliness.

For more information on viral and bacterial infections and the use of antibiotics, please contact your health care professional at the **Cresco Medical Clinic** at (563) 547-2022, toll free 1-888-547-5474, or the **Lime Springs Medical Clinic & Pharmacy** at (563) 566-2243, toll free 1-800-593-5463.

Cresco Medical Clinic
321 8th Avenue West
Cresco, IA 52136



A Department of Regional Health Services of Howard County

Visit our web site at: **www.rhshc.com**