

Antimicrobial Stewardship

A Patient's Guide

Antimicrobials are a group of drugs that kill bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites. Antimicrobial stewardship programs help ensure patients get the right drug, at the right dose, for the right length of time.

Antimicrobial stewardship helps patients.

Doctors, pharmacists, and others work behind the scenes with your care team on:

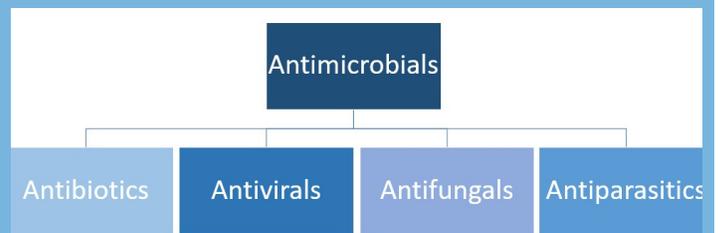
-  The most effective medicines for your condition, with the least side effects.
-  The ideal length of time you need to take an antimicrobial to get healthy -- and nothing more. Excess treatment may lead to complications, added cost, and contribute to the drugs losing effectiveness in the future (resistance).
-  The correct amount of a drug for your body and condition.
-  Whether it is safe for you to receive antimicrobials by mouth instead of IV.

The Carolina Antimicrobial Stewardship Program's (CASP) team of physicians, pharmacists, microbiologists, nurses, and others lends expertise to ensure that UNC Medical Center patients get the right antimicrobial drug at the right dose for the right duration.

Common Questions

Are antibiotics the same as antimicrobials?

Antibiotics are one type of antimicrobial. Antibiotics can only kill or treat bacteria. Each type of germ has a type of medicine that will kill or treat it.



What is antimicrobial stewardship?

Stewardship means carefully managing a valuable, limited resource. Antimicrobials are one such resource. The goal of antimicrobial stewardship is to optimize treatment for the best possible patient outcomes, while also working to preserve their usefulness in modern medicine. Antimicrobial stewardship works in ways that are ethical, accountable, and responsible, both to individual patients and to society.

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We all have a role in antimicrobial stewardship – patients included.



Remind your healthcare provider you only want to take antibiotics and other antimicrobials if appropriate for their condition. If you are not sure why you have been prescribed an antimicrobial, ask questions.



Do your best to take medicines as prescribed.



Preventing infections is your best defense against unnecessary antimicrobial use. Infection prevention practices that work well against COVID-19—washing hands carefully, wearing masks, and keeping distance from those who may be sick—are also effective at preventing other contagious illnesses. Be sure all vaccines and boosters are up-to-date, including for common infections such as seasonal flu and pneumonia.



Carolina Antimicrobial Stewardship Program

www.med.unc.edu/casp

What is antimicrobial resistance?

Each time a person takes an antimicrobial, there is a chance for the germ (a virus, bacteria, fungi, or parasite) to change. These changes allow it to survive when faced with a medicine that would typically kill it. When this happens, the germ (not the person) is resistant to certain antimicrobials.

As an antimicrobial kills germs that have not changed, the resistant germs left behind can thrive without the competition. Different drugs may be needed to kill resistant germs. However, some germs have changed to the point that they are very hard or impossible to treat with existing antimicrobials. Such infections are present here in North Carolina.

When a drug can no longer kill germs, doctors have one less tool available to treat illnesses. Currently, there are not enough new antimicrobials in development to replace the ones that no longer work because of resistance.

Resistance cannot be reversed, only slowed. Antimicrobial stewardship is one way to slow resistance.

Antimicrobials used to treat *people* are one important way resistance is growing. Widespread overuse of antimicrobials on farms also contributes to the problem. In the future, many people could die of common infections as they did before the antimicrobials were invented.

Do all hospitals have stewardship programs?

The government requires most hospitals to have antimicrobial stewardship programs because research proves they are effective at improving patient outcomes, lowering costs, and slowing antimicrobial resistance. Some hospitals, including those at UNC Medical Center, used stewardship practices before they were required.