Key messages for general public

When should I take antibiotics?
Antibiotics are not the solution for infections caused by viruses such as common colds or flu. Antibiotics are effective only against bacterial infections. The correct diagnosis and the decision about whether antibiotics are necessary can only be made by a medical doctor.

Remember: Antibiotics won't work in the case of cold or flu

- Antibiotics are effective only against bacterial infections – they cannot help you recover from infections caused by viruses such as common colds or flu [1].
- Antibiotics do not prevent viruses from spreading to other persons.
- Taking antibiotics for wrong reasons, such as against colds or flu, has no benefit for you [1, 2].
- Misuse of antibiotics only causes bacteria to become resistant to antibiotic treatments [3, 4, 5]. So when you need antibiotics in the future they may no longer work [6].
- Antibiotics often give you side effects such as diarrhoea [1, 2, 7, 8].
- Always seek your doctor's advice before taking antibiotics.
- Antibiotics and pandemic flu: What should I do?

How should I take antibiotics?
When the doctor has confirmed that antibiotics are necessary, it is very important to take the antibiotics in a responsible manner.

Remember: Take antibiotics responsibly

- Antibiotic use causes bacteria to become resistant to antibiotic treatments [3, 4, 5], therefore it is important not to take antibiotics for the wrong reasons or incorrectly [1, 2, 9].
- Take antibiotics only when prescribed by a doctor and follow the doctor's advice on how to take the antibiotics so that they can stay effective also in the future.
- Do not keep leftover antibiotic treatments [10]. If you have received more doses than you were prescribed, ask your pharmacist about how to dispose of the remaining medicines.

Why should I take antibiotics responsibly?
Wrong or incorrect use of antibiotics may cause the bacteria to become resistant against future treatments. This is a health hazard not just for the person having taken the antibiotics inappropriately but also for anyone else who might catch the resistant bacteria afterwards.

Remember: Keeping antibiotics effective is everybody's responsibility

- Antibiotics are losing their effectiveness at a pace that was unforeseen even five years ago [11]. This is because antibiotic use causes bacteria to become resistant to antibiotic treatments [3–5].
- If we continue to consume antibiotics at the current rate, Europe may face a return to the pre-antibiotic era, where a common bacterial infection such as pneumonia could be a death sentence [12, 13]. So when you do need antibiotics in the future they may no longer work [6].
- Do not use antibiotics for the wrong reasons or incorrectly [1, 2, 9].
- Always follow your doctor's advice on when and how to use antibiotics in a responsible way so that they can stay effective also in the future.

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