



wise use of Antibiotics

Media Release

Fewer New Zealanders taking antibiotics this winter

Research shows that fewer New Zealanders are likely to reach for antibiotics to treat colds and flu, compared to numbers seen four years ago.

And with today's launch of the Wise Use of Antibiotics Campaign 2004, that vigilance on antibiotic use is set to continue.

The campaign, now in its sixth year, is spearheaded by PHARMAC, with support from the Plunket Society, the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners and the Pharmaceutical Society. It aims to educate people about the need to only take antibiotics in the right situations.

PHARMAC Medical Director Dr Peter Moodie says research carried out in 2000 showed that only 20% of New Zealanders understood that antibiotics were not an effective way to treat their cold or flu. The same research was conducted at the end of last winter, revealing that nearly half the people who visited their doctor understood the role of antibiotics in treating colds and flu.

He says this shows one of the campaign messages, that antibiotics can't fight viral infections such as colds and flu, is having a positive impact upon New Zealanders' health.

If antibiotics are overused, it increases the risk of bacteria becoming resistant to them. However, if people are prescribed antibiotics for bacterial infections, they should make sure they finish the whole course of the treatment.

Dr Peter Moodie says the latest research shows both doctors and the public are being more vigilant in the yearly battle with colds and flu.

“People are far more aware about appropriate antibiotic use. With more than half of all New Zealanders set to experience either a cold or the flu this winter, it's good to see more and more people know the correct way to fight the illnesses.”

That means people are no longer seeing antibiotics as a “quick fix” for colds and flu. In 2003 there were about 20,000 fewer antibiotic prescriptions written than the year before.

“While the statistics are heartening, it is important to keep the awareness going as we head into winter,” says Dr Peter Moodie.

“Parents in particular need to remain vigilant and do need to have their children checked out by a health professional if there is any doubt.”

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For more information call (021) 429-212.