

# ANTIBIOTICS:

How the RISKS of USING may outweigh the RISKS of NOT-USING, particularly for infections commonly caused by viruses

Most antibiotics for common infections are considered safe, but this “reputation” may be overstated. For infections caused by viruses and those known to resolve on their own, the potential harms should be appreciated.

**DON'T UNDERESTIMATE potential antibiotic harms!**



High rates of antibiotic use leads to bacteria being **RESISTANT** to the drug's effects.

Antibiotics are responsible for almost **1 OUT OF 5** Emergency Room visits for adverse drug events.



It is common to have undesirable side effects.

**RARE BUT SERIOUS** adverse events can occur, e.g. tendon problems, severe skin reactions.



Allergic reactions can occur with any antibiotic. The more serious reactions are rare but can be life-threatening.

There aren't really any harms with antibiotics are there?

Well — Yes  
Actually there are!!!  
Consider the following...



For more information, visit [www.RxFiles.ca/ABX](http://www.RxFiles.ca/ABX)

## Antibiotics: Potential Harms

Antibiotics are a valuable resource and judicious use is very important. For many serious infections (e.g. pneumonia, bacterial meningitis, sexually transmitted infections) the benefits of antibiotics clearly outweigh potential harms. However, for conditions that are primarily viral (e.g. pharyngitis, acute sinusitis, acute bronchitis), the benefits are minimal and likely outweighed by harms. Of note: antibiotic-related adverse drug events account for 1 out of every 5 visits to the Emergency Department.<sup>1</sup>

### Common Adverse Events

Overall NNH = 8-12

Yeast infection NNH = 23

- In a meta-analysis (10 trials, 2450 patients) comparing antibiotics to placebo for acute rhinosinusitis, common adverse events (such as **nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or abdominal pain**) occurred in 27% of patients on antibiotics versus 15% on placebo (NNH = 8-12).<sup>2,5</sup> The antibiotics used in this meta-analysis included **penicillins, macrolides, and tetracyclines**. Trials examining other populations have found similar numbers of adverse events.<sup>3,4,5</sup>
- A recent meta-analysis comparing amoxicillin or amox/clav to placebo found risk of **yeast infection** (candidiasis) ~ 8x higher in those on antibiotics (NNH = 23).<sup>6</sup>

### Allergic Reactions

NNH from 20 (rash, hives) to 10,000 (anaphylaxis)

Allergic reactions can occur with any antibiotic; **penicillin** in particular is well studied. About 5-10% of patients will self-report a penicillin allergy;<sup>7,8</sup> however the vast majority of these reactions are delayed reactions, occurring days to weeks after initiating therapy, and do not typically indicate a true allergy.<sup>9</sup> Anaphylaxis occurs in about 0.01% of patients taking penicillin; about 10% of these reactions are fatal (i.e. 0.001% of all patients prescribed penicillin).<sup>10,11,12</sup>

### Serious Adverse Events

NNH from 300 to 30,000

Rare but serious adverse events are associated with all antibiotics. Large, long-term randomized controlled trials are uncommon, and so it is difficult to put a precise estimate on how prevalent these events are. However, some adverse events include:

- **Clostridium difficile infection**: associated most often with **clindamycin** (RR≈4), cephalosporins, and fluoroquinolones; risk varies depending on patient factors.<sup>13,14,15</sup>
- **Stevens Johnson Syndrome, Toxic Epidermal Necrolysis, & other severe skin reactions**: these events occur a few times per 100,000 antibiotic prescriptions.<sup>16</sup> Cotrimoxazole in particular has a higher association than most other antibiotics.<sup>17</sup>
- **QT prolongation**: associated most often with macrolides (esp. **clarithromycin** and **erythromycin**) and fluoroquinolones (esp. **levofloxacin** and **moxifloxacin**). Risk of QT prolongation is also dependent on other factors (e.g. cardiac, metabolic, other drugs, etc.). See RxFiles QT Prolongation page 32 (11<sup>th</sup> Ed).
- **Tendon rupture with fluoroquinolones**: one large cohort study found a risk of 3.5% for tendon rupture in adults over the age of 65.<sup>18</sup>
- **Hyperkalemia with cotrimoxazole**: in older adults taking medications which can raise potassium (such as **ACEIs, ARBs, spironolactone, or NSAIDs**), **cotrimoxazole** was associated with sudden death (NNH ≈ 300).<sup>19,20</sup>
- **Contraceptive failure/drug interaction?** Although this is thought to be unlikely, there is a small but real risk & a backup birth control method is always recommended.

Other There are many other less common harms than can be covered here! e.g. serum sickness like reactions, pulmonary fibrosis with nitrofurantoin, tooth discoloration with tetracyclines

### Antibiotic Resistance

NNH as low as 1???

Every course of antibiotic is likely to result in some emerging resistance which could affect the next choice of antibiotic regimen for that individual, especially if within 3 months of the previous antibiotic. Of course the NNH for catastrophic resistance would be much higher.

Resistance to an antibacterial can develop quickly. For example, strains of *Streptococcus pneumoniae* resistant to **levofloxacin** were documented in the same year levofloxacin was introduced to the market.<sup>21</sup> Rare, but worrisome, reports of bacteria resistant to every available antimicrobial can be found in the literature.<sup>22</sup>

The good news is that when prescribing patterns change, resistance rates decline.<sup>23,24</sup>

**Quotes from the team** ☺: Harms speak louder when there is little or no benefit to offset them!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: We would like to thank those who contributed to the development & review of this discussion document. Alex Crawley, Lynette Kosar, Loren Regier, Brent Jensen, Yvonne Shevchuk, and the rest of the RxFiles Team.

**DISCLAIMER:** The content of this newsletter represents the research, experience and opinions of the authors and not those of the Board or Administration of Saskatoon Health Region (SHR). Neither the authors nor Saskatoon Health Region nor any other party who has been involved in the preparation or publication of this work warrants or represents that the information contained herein is accurate or complete, and they are not responsible for any errors or omissions or for the result obtained from the use of such information. Any use of the newsletter will imply acknowledgment of this disclaimer and release any responsibility of SHR, its employees, servants or agents. Readers are encouraged to confirm the information contained herein with other sources. Additional information and references online at [www.RxFiles.ca](http://www.RxFiles.ca)

Copyright 2016 – RxFiles, Saskatoon Health Region (SHR) [www.RxFiles.ca](http://www.RxFiles.ca)

## References

1. Shehab N, Patel PR, Srinivasan A, Budnitz DS. Emergency department visits for antibiotic-associated adverse events. *Clin Infect Dis*. 2008 Sep 15;47(6):735-43.
2. Lemiengre MB, van Driel ML, Merenstein D, Young J, De Sutter AI. Antibiotics for clinically diagnosed acute rhinosinusitis in adults. *Cochrane Database Syst Rev* 2012;10:CD006089.
3. Smith SM, Fahey T, Smucny J, et al. Antibiotics for acute bronchitis. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2014, Issue 3.
4. Venekamp, Roderick P., et al. "Antibiotics for acute otitis media in children." *The Cochrane Library* (2013).
5. Rosenfeld, Richard M. "Acute Sinusitis in Adults." *New England Journal of Medicine* 375.10 (2016): 962-970.
6. Gillies M, Ranakusuma A, Hoffmann T, et al. Common harms from amoxicillin: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized placebo-controlled trials for any indication. *CMAJ : Canadian Medical Association Journal*. 2015;187(1):E21-E31. doi:10.1503/cmaj.140848.
7. Lee CE, Zembower TR, Fotis MA, Postelnick MJ, Greenberger PA, Peterson LR, Noskin GA. The incidence of antimicrobial allergies in hospitalized patients: implications regarding prescribing patterns and emerging bacterial resistance. *Arch Intern Med*. 2000 Oct 9;160(18):2819-22.
8. Joint Task Force on Practice Parameters; American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology; American College of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology; Joint Council of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology. Drug allergy: an updated practice parameter. *Ann Allergy Asthma Immunol*. 2010 Oct;105(4):259-273.
9. Johansson SG, Bieber T, Dahl R, Friedmann PS, Lanier BQ, Lockey RF, Motala C, Ortega Martell JA, Platts-Mills TA, Ring J, Thien F, Van Cauwenberge P, Williams HC. Revised nomenclature for allergy for global use: Report of the Nomenclature Review Committee of the World Allergy Organization, October 2003. *J Allergy Clin Immunol*. 2004 May;113(5):832-6.
10. Bhattacharya S. The facts about penicillin allergy: A review. *Journal of Advanced Pharmaceutical Technology & Research*. 2010;1(1):11-17.
11. Idsoe O, Guthe T, Willcox RR, de Weck AL. Nature and extent of penicillin side-reactions, with particular reference to fatalities from anaphylactic shock. *Bull World Health Organ*. 1968;38(2):159-88.
12. Allergic reactions to long-term benzathine penicillin prophylaxis for rheumatic fever. International Rheumatic Fever Study Group. *Lancet*. 1991 Jun 1;337(8753):1308-10.
13. Smieja M. Current indications for the use of clindamycin: A critical review. *The Canadian Journal of Infectious Diseases*. 1998;9(1):22-28.
14. Brown, Kevin A., et al. "Meta-analysis of antibiotics and the risk of community-associated *Clostridium difficile* infection." *Antimicrobial agents and chemotherapy* 57.5 (2013): 2326-2332.
15. Slimings C, Riley TV. Antibiotics and hospital-acquired *Clostridium difficile* infection: update of systematic review and meta-analysis. *J Antimicrob Chemother* 2014;69:881-891.
16. Chan HL, Stern RS, Arndt KA, Langlois J, Jick SS, Jick H, Walker AM. The incidence of erythema multiforme, Stevens-Johnson syndrome, and toxic epidermal necrolysis. A population-based study with particular reference to reactions caused by drugs among outpatients. *Arch Dermatol*. 1990 Jan;126(1):43-7.
17. Mockenhaupt M, Viboud C, Dunant A, et al. Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis: assessment of medication risks with emphasis on recently marketed drugs. The EuroSCAR-study. *J Invest Dermatol* 2008;128:35e44.
18. Daneman, Nick, Hong Lu, and Donald A. Redelmeier. "Fluoroquinolones and collagen associated severe adverse events: a longitudinal cohort study." *BMJ open* 5.11 (2015): e010077.
19. Fralick M, Macdonald EM, Gomes T, Antoniou T, Hollands S, Mamdani MM, Juurlink DN; Canadian Drug Safety and Effectiveness Research Network.. Co-trimoxazole and sudden death in patients receiving inhibitors of renin-angiotensin system: population based study. *Drug Safety and Effectiveness Research Network*. Trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole and risk of sudden death among patients taking spironolactone. *CMAJ*. 2015 Mar 3;187(4):E138-43.
20. Antoniou T, Hollands S, Macdonald EM, Gomes T, Mamdani MM, Juurlink DN; Canadian Drug Safety and Effectiveness Research Network. Trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole and risk of sudden death among patients taking spironolactone. *CMAJ*. 2015 Mar 3;187(4):E138-43.
21. Antibiotic Resistance Threats in the United States, 2013. Centre for Disease Control. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/pdf/ar-threats-2013-508.pdf> October 6, 2016.
22. Souli, Maria, I. Galani, and H. Giamarellou. "Emergence of extensively drug-resistant and pandrug-resistant Gram-negative bacilli in Europe." *Euro surveillance: bulletin Europeen sur les maladies transmissibles= European communicable disease bulletin* 13.47 (2008): 5437-5453.
23. Seppälä, Helena, et al. "The effect of changes in the consumption of macrolide antibiotics on erythromycin resistance in group A streptococci in Finland." *New England Journal of Medicine* 337.7 (1997): 441-446.
24. Mölstad, Sigvard, et al. "Sustained reduction of antibiotic use and low bacterial resistance: 10-year follow-up of the Swedish Strama programme." *The Lancet infectious diseases* 8.2 (2008): 125-132.





# Details That Matter

~

## Objective & Evidence-based Drug Information

Drug Comparison Charts  
11th Edition  
Available April 2017

[www.RxFiles.ca](http://www.RxFiles.ca)

# Rx FILES

There's an APP!

**Follow Us:**  
through email updates

OR  
ON:



## Geri-RxFiles 2nd Edition

