



Community Infection Prevention and Control Policy for General Practice

(also suitable for adoption by other healthcare providers,
e.g. Dental Practice, Podiatry)

Antimicrobial stewardship

ANTIMICROBIAL STEWARDSHIP

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ANTIMICROBIAL STEWARDSHIP

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1. Introduction

Antibiotics are key to modern medicine and treatment. However, an increasing number of common infections are becoming resistant to the medicines designed to treat them. This is referred to as antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

AMR is a significant and growing threat to public health in the UK and around the world. It has been identified as one of the most pressing global challenges this century. In 2019, there were 4.95 million deaths associated with bacterial AMR across 204 countries, and 1.27 million of those were directly attributed, leading the World Health Organisation (WHO) to declare it one of the top 10 global public health threats.

Estimates predict a three-fold rise in global antibiotic consumption by 2030, but no new class of antibiotics has been discovered and made available since the 1980s. The COVID-19 global pandemic also brought AMR into sharper focus. While COVID-19 is a virus, so antibiotics are not effective against it, people may develop secondary bacterial infections requiring antibiotics.

Staff in General Practice are the first point of contact for and manage the vast majority of patients with infection and infectious disease. General Practice prescribing accounts for around 80% of NHS antibiotic use and this needs to be both necessary and appropriate.

Ensuring that antimicrobial prescribing in General Practice is necessary and appropriate is an ongoing challenge. The reasons for this are complex and include:

- Patient and relatives' expectations
- Prescribing when there is uncertainty about a clinical diagnosis
- A lack of evidence regarding how to protect patients from acquiring antibiotic resistant infections
- A lack of immediate access to diagnostic tests and results

2. Antimicrobial stewardship

Antimicrobial stewardship (AMS) is part of the fight against AMR. The purpose of AMS is to ensure 'the right antibiotic for the right patient, at the right time, with the right dose, and the right route, causing the least harm to the patient and future patients'. AMS includes optimising prescribing of antibiotics and raising public awareness of AMR.

3. What is antimicrobial resistance (AMR)?

AMR occurs when the microorganisms which cause disease are no longer affected by antimicrobial medicines such as antibiotics, antivirals, antifungals, that are used to kill them, prevent and treat the disease.

While resistance is a natural occurrence, from a healthcare perspective it is accelerated by:

- Inappropriate and over use of antimicrobial medicines
- Poor infection prevention and control practices
- A lack of new antimicrobial medicines being developed

4. How important is it that we tackle AMR?

We rely on antibiotics, antivirals and antifungals, to treat the microorganisms that cause many common diseases, such as urinary tract infection (UTI), chest infections, bloodstream infections, food poisoning and tuberculosis (TB). These microorganisms, however, can already resist a wide range of antimicrobial medicines.

There are few replacement antibiotics or alternative products in development, and even fewer which target specific 'super-resistant' bacteria, viruses, or other microorganisms. This is partly due to how new drug development is funded.

As resistance continues to increase, more people will suffer for longer as infections become more difficult to treat, resulting in longer hospital admissions, routine surgical procedures becoming more dangerous to perform, and higher death rates. The impact of AMR, therefore, has a detrimental effect on the working of modern medicine and will affect everyone.

5. What is needed in General Practice to tackle AMR?

- Optimal prevention and control of infections, through consistent use of 'Standard infection control precautions' (SICPs) and, where required, 'Transmission based precautions' (TBPs).
- All General Practice providers should have a designated lead for antimicrobial stewardship, this may be the designated Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) or the Prescribing Lead for the Practice.
- Timely, accurate diagnosis of infection in patients when they develop symptoms. It is essential that urine dipstick is not used to diagnose UTI in

those over 65 years or with a urinary catheter. Refer to the 'Specimen Collection Policy for General Practice' and the 'UTI diagnosis in adults: Guide for General Practice' and the 'General Practice guide: diagnosing suspected UTI in catheterised adults OR those over 65 years' available to download at www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk.

- Appropriate prescribing and use of antimicrobials only when there are clinical signs of an infection, in accordance with local antimicrobial prescribing policies and national guidance, e.g. 'Treat Antibiotics Responsibly, Guidance, Education and Tools' (TARGET) antibiotics toolkit.
- All General Practice staff involved in prescribing, dispensing and administration of antimicrobials should receive induction and appropriate training in prudent antimicrobial use and the principles of antimicrobial stewardship. Training is provided by Health Education England (HEE).
- All prescribers should have access to, and act on, advice on antibiotic use from medicines management/optimisation teams and microbiologists.
- General Practice staff should participate in local and national activities designed to support antimicrobial stewardship, such as back-up or delayed antibiotic prescriptions, and antibiotic awareness campaigns.
- General Practice staff can encourage patients to use antibiotics responsibly, educating them about the importance of taking antimicrobials as directed, not saving them for later, and returning any unused antibiotics to community pharmacies for safe disposal. Using patient information leaflets has been shown to increase patient understanding and satisfaction with a prescribing decision.

6. Infection Prevention and Control resources, education and training

The Community IPC Team have produced a wide range of innovative educational and IPC resources designed to assist your General Practice in achieving compliance with the *Health and Social Care Act 2008: code of practice on the prevention and control of infection and related guidance* and CQC registration requirements.

These resources are either free to download from the website or available at a minimal cost covering administration and printing:

- 27 IPC Policy documents for General Practice
- Preventing Infection Workbook: Guidance for General Practice
- IPC CQC inspection preparation Pack for General Practice
- IPC audit tools, posters, leaflets and factsheets
- IPC Bulletin for General Practice Staff

In addition, we hold educational study events in North Yorkshire.

Further information on these high quality evidence-based resources is available at www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk.

7. References

Department of Health and Social Care (Updated December 2022) *Health and Social Care Act 2008: code of practice on the prevention and control of infections and related guidance*

Health Education England *Antimicrobial resistance* www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/antimicrobial-resistance

NHS England *Antimicrobial resistance (AMR)* www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/prevention/antimicrobial-resistance-amr/

Royal College of General Practitioners (June 2023) *Summary of antimicrobial prescribing guidance - managing common infections* <https://elearning.rcgp.org.uk/mod/book/view.php?id=12648&chapterid=453>

Royal College of General Practitioners *TARGET antibiotics toolkit hub* www.rcgp.org.uk/targetantibiotics

UK Health Security Agency (November 2023) English surveillance programme for antimicrobial utilisation and resistance (ESPAUR) Report 2022 to 2023 www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-surveillance-programme-antimicrobial-utilisation-and-resistance-espaur-report

UK Health Security Agency (2023) *Become an Antibiotic Guardian* <https://antibioticguardian.com/>

UK Health Security Agency (2022) *TARGET antibiotics toolkit hub* <https://elearning.rcgp.org.uk/course/view.php?id=553>

World Health Organisation *Antimicrobial resistance* www.who.int/health-topics/antimicrobial-resistance