

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Media Alert

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TO COUNTER ‘ONE OF THE WORLD’S MOST PRESSING HEALTH PROBLEMS’

“Antibiotics Are Not Always The Answer”

ALBUQUERQUE – With antibiotic resistance emerging as “one of the world’s most pressing health problems” according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the cold and flu season beginning, the New Mexico Department of Health today launched a statewide campaign to help build awareness about the appropriate use of antibiotics.

“*Antibiotics Are Not Always The Answer*” is a public education campaign that aims to help New Mexicans become better informed about antibiotic treatment. The campaign’s key message is a basic medical fact: antibiotics are not designed to treat certain common illnesses like colds, flu and bronchitis.

“Research tells us that many people don’t understand that antibiotics do not cure – or even help – certain diseases,” said Patricia Montoya, RN, MPA, State Secretary of Health. “People go to the doctor expecting to get antibiotics for a sick child or themselves. Many times, a prescription for antibiotics is the worse course of treatment – like using them for a cold.”

In fact, national estimates show that over 20 million antibiotic prescriptions are prescribed in doctors’ offices each year for infections like bronchitis, chest colds, sore throats and the flu

- diseases that are not treatable with antibiotics. That indicates that too many antibiotics are being used unnecessarily.

“Antibiotics are powerful drugs that can work wonders when used for the right illnesses,” said Dr. Bernadette Albanese, an epidemiologist with the State Department of Health. “But please don’t insist on antibiotics when your doctor says you don’t need them.”

Department of Health Launches Antibiotics Educational Campaign

Taking antibiotics when they are not needed creates health risks. Widespread inappropriate use of antibiotics is fueling an increase in drug-resistant bacteria – germs that have developed ways to fight off antibiotics. Over the last decade, infections due to these resistant bacterial germs have spread and are now less responsive to antibiotic treatment when it is needed. These ‘superbugs’ can spread through a community, introducing new strains of infectious diseases that are more difficult to cure and more expensive to treat. The New Mexico Department of Health tracks patterns of resistant organisms, including *Streptococcus pneumoniae*, a leading cause of ear infections, meningitis and pneumonia. For the past two years, 20% of *Streptococcus pneumoniae* in New Mexico were resistant to penicillin, forcing doctors to use ‘last resort’ drugs to treat patients with these infections.

While the number of drug-resistant illnesses is increasing, the good news is that people of all ages can lower their risk by learning about appropriate antibiotic use and taking antibiotics only when they are needed, especially during the cold and flu season.

The Department of Health is sending this message to New Mexico through its educational campaign, “*Antibiotics Are Not Always The Answer.*” The multimedia campaign will reach New Mexico residents statewide beginning October 29, 2003. The campaign includes English and Spanish television and radio announcements, brochures and fact cards. All components offer information on when antibiotics are and are not needed, tips on staying healthy, as well as information on what individuals can do to feel better faster if they are not prescribed an antibiotic.

For more information or to request free program materials, please contact the New Mexico Department of Health Office of Epidemiology at (505) 827-0006 or visit www.health.state.nm.us.

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