



BC Centre for Disease Control
AN AGENCY OF THE PROVINCIAL HEALTH SERVICES AUTHORITY

Press Release
For Immediate Release
January 12, 2006

COMMUNITY PROGRAM AIMS TO TACKLE ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE

VANCOUVER – Today the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) and the Provincial Health Officer launched a province-wide informational program to help children, families and health care professionals address antibiotic resistance. The BCCDC will receive almost \$1.4 million over three years from the province to coordinate the *Do Bugs Need Drugs?* program throughout BC.

The program includes a month-long public campaign with television and theatre ads, distribution of a parent information booklet in *Today's Parent* magazine, and other print materials such as posters, stickers and health professional resources. The focus is on three simple messages to help increase public knowledge and awareness regarding the use of antibiotic drugs:

1. **Wash your hands!** Handwashing is the best way to stop the spread of infections.
2. **Not all bugs are created equal.** Antibiotics work against bacteria, but not against viruses.
3. **Use antibiotics wisely!** Bacteria can become resistant to antibiotics.

“Treating someone with antibiotics when they have a virus is like trying to bail out a leaky boat with a fire extinguisher,” says Dr. David Patrick, Director of Epidemiology for the BCCDC. “It’s just the wrong tool to do the job.” What Dr. Patrick is concerned about are serious and potentially life threatening bacterial infections, such as those caused by Methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, which can no longer be treated with conventional antibiotics. Antibiotic resistance is caused by bacteria’s ability to mutate, and by the inappropriate use of the drugs. “We know that at least one out of every two or three antibiotic prescriptions simply don’t work because they are prescribed for viral illnesses. The more this occurs, the more likely that the antibiotics will not be effective when we really need them to be.” Patrick acknowledges that physicians have contributed to a reduction of antibiotic prescriptions in recent years, but that problems associated with antibiotic resistance are not that easily thwarted. “The World Health Organization has stated that antibiotic resistance is a global issue, which requires immediate action. That’s why public and health care professional education on this issue is crucial.”

The Do Bugs Need Drugs? program will roll-out in health authorities over the next year. The program includes an interactive educational component that will be made available for preschool and grade two children in the province. Young children will learn the difference between viruses and bacteria, when antibiotics should be used and the importance of washing their hands to stay healthy. They will also be provided with informational materials to take home

to their families. Vancouver Coastal Health has piloted the program in several schools over the last year, where it was well received by teachers, parents and students.

“This program is important not only because it addresses antibiotic resistance through education, but because it teaches young children an illness prevention skill they can use throughout their lives,” said Dr. Perry Kendall, Provincial Health Officer for BC. “We know that a high proportion of infections can be prevented by simply washing hands more frequently. It’s one of the best ways that people of all ages can protect their health, and in turn the health of those around them.”

The program also includes distribution of informational materials to health units in each regional health authority. In addition, to help guide antibiotic prescriptions, an antimicrobial reference guide will be sent to all doctors, dentists, pharmacists and health care students training in these disciplines, along with nurse practitioners and infection control professionals. The BCCDC will also be conducting an evaluation to measure changes in public attitudes and behaviour around antibiotic use and hand washing practices, as well as antibiotic prescribing practices by physicians.

Do Bugs Need Drugs? was developed in Alberta by Dr. Edith Blondel-Hill along with other health care professionals and organizations, and has since been adopted by some communities in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario, as well as in Bologna, Italy. Dr. Blondel-Hill, now a medical microbiologist at BC Children's Hospital, has championed the program's introduction in BC based on its success.

More information on the *Do Bugs Need Drugs?* program can be found at www.dobugsneeddrugs.org/.

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