

Press Information

1 in 4 Consumers Persist in Demanding Antibiotics For Colds and Flu

Over a quarter of the population are likely to demand antibiotics for colds and flu this winter, despite Government warnings to the contrary, according to a survey of consumer behaviour released today (Thursday 8th October 1998).

The nationwide survey, commissioned by the Consumer Health Information Centre (CHIC), showed that in the weeks following the announcement of the Government's recommendations against the routine use of antibiotics for colds and flu, which was aimed at slowing the development of antibiotic resistance and "super bugs", consumers have yet to get the message. More importantly, the survey highlighted some of the reasons for the demand - a demand based on myths and misunderstanding.

In the survey of over 2,000 British adults, most wanted antibiotics in order to get better quicker. This was particularly true of those aged 16 to 24, one of the age groups most likely to be under pressure not to go off sick from work or college. Another reason cited was that consumers believed that antibiotics actually worked on colds and flu; this myth was particularly common in the 65+ age group.

"Antibiotics only act against bacterial infections and do not work on viruses such as colds and flu," said Dr Catti Moss, practising GP and spokesperson for the CHIC. "Everyone needs to hear this message, along with simple advice on what you can actually do to help yourself. We all need to accept the fact that, until a cure for the common cold is found, there is no quick fix. The only way to deal with these viruses is to relieve the symptoms with a remedy from the pharmacy and let the virus run its course."

The CHIC survey results suggest that people do not lack the confidence to self-medicate, but they do need reassurance. Following its success in 1997, the CHIC is therefore launching its second colds and flu campaign to try to bridge the information gap, steering consumers towards the pharmacy to gain on-the-spot expert advice. The campaign will also offer a local call rate helpline service, on **0845 6061611**, manned by trained health care professionals who can advise on symptoms and appropriate treatment steps.

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Consumers can also visit the CHIC website at www.chic.org.uk or obtain a copy of the new **Ebenezer Sneezer's Guide to Colds and Flu** leaflet which explains the differences between colds and flu and how to treat the symptoms. Information posters are also being distributed to doctors' surgeries across the UK in the next few weeks, with the strong message: "Did you know antibiotics don't work on colds and flu? Ask your pharmacist for advice on how best to treat your symptoms", and featuring a checklist of cold and flu symptoms.

According to earlier research, conducted by the PAGB (Proprietary Association of Great Britain), 39% of GP time is spent dealing with patients suffering from self-treatable minor ailments such as colds and flu.

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Notes to editors:

- The Gallup Organization conducted 2054 telephone interviews with a representative sample of British adults aged 16+ between the 18th and 23rd of September 1998. Quotas were set for region and the sample was weighted to the known profile of all adults. There is a margin of error of 2.2%.
- Established in 1997, the Consumer Health Information Centre aims to help improve people's understanding of common ailments and to offer guidance on how they can improve the management of their own health. The Centre is being advised by an expert panel of doctors and nurses, consumer information campaigners and pharmacists who recognise the need to develop the concept after reviewing extensive research with the general public.
- Consumers can receive a free copy of the Consumer Health Information Centre's leaflet "Ebenezer Sneezer's Guide to Colds and Flu". If you would like to mention this offer in your publication, please contact Rowan Unsworth at Grayling on 0171 255 1100.
- A full press pack is also available, featuring information such as: a summary of the CHIC survey results; an Antibiotic Fact Sheet; Fact and Fiction about Colds and Flu; the Diary of a Cold; Colds and Flu at a Glance; Cold Truths and information about safe self-medication.

For further information please contact:

Rowan Unsworth/Cathryn Turner/Alison Miles
Grayling, 4 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3RA
Tel: 0171 255 1100; Fax: 0171 631 0602

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