

December 2005

Dear Health Plan Member,

With the cold and flu season in full swing, now is the best time to alert you to the dangers of the misuse of antibiotics. Antibiotics are strong medicines that can stop some infections and save lives. But antibiotics can cause more harm than good when they aren't used the right way. You can protect yourself and your family by knowing when you should use antibiotics and when you shouldn't.

What are some of the most common respiratory infections that are usually caused by viruses- germs that are not killed by antibiotics?

- ▶ Cold
- ▶ Flu
- ▶ Chest Cold (in otherwise healthy children and adults)
- ▶ Sore Throats (except strep)
- ▶ Bronchitis (in otherwise healthy children and adults)
- ▶ Runny Nose (with green or yellow mucus)
- ▶ Fluid in the Middle Ear (otitis media with effusion)

What can you do to protect yourself and your family?

- ▶ Don't take antibiotics for colds or the flu. Often the best thing you can do is to let colds and flu run their course. Sometimes this can take two weeks or more. Call your doctor if your illness gets worse after two weeks.
- ▶ Reduce the spread of viral infections through frequent hand washing, and by avoiding close contact with others.
- ▶ Talk with your healthcare provider about antibiotic resistance.
- ▶ When your doctor prescribes an antibiotic, take the medication exactly as instructed. Complete the prescribed course even if you are feeling better. If treatment stops too soon, some bacteria may survive and re-infect you. Throw away any leftover medication once you have completed your prescription. Don't save any antibiotics for the next time you get sick or share them with another family member.

Please take the time to become familiar with the threat of antibiotic resistance by reading the enclosed brochure, published by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

We encourage you to participate in your own good health and that of your family. If you have any questions about this information, please refer to your Primary Care Physician or contact the Foundation at one of the numbers below.