

Long-term Care Antibiotic Awareness



What to Know about Respiratory Tract Infections

Respiratory infections are one of the most common infections among residents of long-term care facilities and cause an average of two million infections each year. These infections occur when bacteria or viruses get into various parts of the respiratory tract such as the nose, sinuses, throat, and lungs. Examples of respiratory infections include the common cold, influenza, ear infections, sore throats, and bronchitis. Symptoms may include:

- ❖ Runny or stuffy nose
- ❖ Sneezing
- ❖ Coughing
- ❖ Headache
- ❖ Feeling tired
- ❖ Sore throat

The good news is that most respiratory infections are caused by viruses and will go away on their own with time, fluids and rest. To diagnose a respiratory infection, the resident will be examined by a health care provider to assess the resident's signs and symptoms. Other tests may be done to help with diagnosis such as a swab of the throat or nasal passages. However, getting an accurate diagnosis can be challenging for a variety of reasons. The elderly in long-term care settings are often not able to clearly tell someone about their symptoms.

About Antibiotics

Antibiotics are only intended for treating infections caused by bacteria. They are not effective against illness caused by viruses. Using antibiotics when they are not needed, or are used incorrectly, can lead to antibiotic resistance which means that common antibiotics may not get rid of infections caused by these germs. Other unwanted problems such as bad reactions, diarrhea, C. diff, and allergies can also occur. Residents who use antibiotics are at increased risk of getting a C. diff infection. If an antibiotic is given, the resident should take the medicine as instructed. The nursing staff will ensure that all doses are given.