

THE BUSINESS STANDARD

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Simple ways to alleviate antibiotic resistance amidst Covid-19

Antibiotics should be taken according to the dosage and guidelines mentioned in prescriptions. Irresponsible use of these drugs can turn harmless diseases harmful



Illustration: Mahbubul H Siddiquee and Mohammad Shojon

Since its discovery in the twentieth century, penicillin has saved millions of lives across the world.

Although more antibiotics were later discovered, with the passage of time, overuse of penicillin has reduced its effectiveness.

Antibiotics are not like other over-the-counter drugs.

To get maximum effectiveness from them, some important guidelines must be followed, such as taking the medicine only according to the prescription, completing its dosage, and avoid making second guesses before taking the medicine.

If the instructions are not followed accordingly, the pathogens (bacteria and other microbes) in the body become quite powerful and it becomes difficult to control their growth inside the body or to destroy them completely.

Consequently, antibiotic resistance develops in the body, something experts around the whole world are extremely worried about.

Diseases that may seem harmless can become harmful in the course of time as the drugs taken to treat those harmless diseases will not be working.

It is important for us to realise that our irresponsible attitude towards antibiotic usage can severely affect our health.

Every year, 700,000 people die from diseases due to antibiotic resistance.

According to a report published by the UN Ad hoc Interagency Coordinating Group (IACG) on Antimicrobial Resistance, drug-resistant diseases could cause 10 million deaths each year by 2050.

Additionally, antimicrobial resistance could force up to 24 million people into extreme poverty by 2030.

Leading think tanks around the world are constantly trying to figure out ways to defuse this time bomb.



An irresponsible attitude towards antibiotic usage can severely affect our health. Photo: Mumit M

During this pandemic, many people are taking antibiotics as prophylaxis or as a treatment even though their effectiveness has not been proven by any study yet, which again increases the likelihood of making the pathogens multidrug-resistant.

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to increased use of antibiotics, and their use either as prophylaxis or as a treatment can ultimately lead to higher microbial /bacterial resistance rate that would impact the burden of disease and deaths during the pandemic and beyond.

Dr Hanan Balkhy, assistant director general for AMR (Antimicrobial Resistance) at WHO, told the British Medical Journal that early data on patients with Covid-19 suggest only a minority have bacterial co-infections.

"WHO continues to be concerned by the inappropriate use of antibiotics, particularly among patients with mild Covid-19," Balkhy said.

The ongoing pandemic has shed light on the public's understanding of infection prevention and its control.

People practicing improved hand-washing techniques and social distancing, and taking various intervention measures to intercept infection throughout the world are showing their increasing health consciousness.

These interventions will likely impact the levels of other infectious agents and antimicrobial resistance and may have positive effects on global health.

Momentum on improved public knowledge regarding infection prevention and control should be linked to antimicrobial resistance and maintained through education and advertising.

The pandemic has highlighted the significance of vaccination, functional antimicrobials and research on the understanding and control of infectious agents.

If we collaborate with authorities, it is possible to reduce antibiotic resistance in our country by taking a few small steps.

In addition to banning antibiotic sales without proper prescriptions, these drugs should be coded with a "red dot" on the back of the blister pack to let buyers know that these are antibiotics and should not be taken irresponsibly.

This practice can be introduced in developing countries like Bangladesh where self-medication, antibiotic resistance, and medication adherence failure are prominent.

Since many users do not complete the whole course, retail sales of one or two tablets should be stopped.

They should be sold only in packages of 7/10/14 tablets according to the dosage.

Moreover, like birth control pills, blister packs of antibiotic drugs can have uni-directional arrows so that patients can follow a systematic method to avoid medication adherence failure.

The uni-directional flowchart will help the recipient to follow the course without any confusion and hesitancy.

By using white and black dots on the back of the packs, it can also be clearly stated whether the medicine should be taken on an empty or full stomach.

To create a better prepared world for emerging public health challenges, it is crucial that we remember the fundamental importance of antibiotics for modern medicine, including protecting patients during a pandemic.

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