

On the occasion of the first World Antibiotics Awareness Week, from 16 to 22 November 2015, the findings of a new WHO multi-country survey on antibiotic resistance are released showing that most people are confused about this major threat to public health and do not understand how to stop it from growing.

Almost two thirds (64%) of some 10 000 people who were surveyed across 12 countries say they know antibiotic resistance is an issue that could affect them and their families, but how it affects them and what they can do to address it are not well understood. For example, 64% of respondents believe antibiotics can be used to treat colds and flu, despite the fact that antibiotics have no impact on viruses. Close to one third (32%) of people surveyed believe they should stop taking antibiotics when they feel better, rather than completing the prescribed course of treatment.

Antibiotic resistance happens when bacteria change and become resistant to the antibiotics used to treat the infections they cause. Overuse and misuse of antibiotics increase the development of resistant bacteria, and the survey points out some of the practices, gaps in understanding and misconceptions which contribute to this phenomenon.

The survey was conducted in 12 countries: Barbados, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria, the Russian Federation, Serbia, South Africa, Sudan and Viet Nam. While not claiming to be exhaustive, this and other surveys will help WHO and partners to determine the key gaps in public understanding of this problem and misconceptions about how to use antibiotics to be addressed through the campaign.

WHO and partners are launching the first World Antibiotics Awareness Week from 16 to 22 November 2015 within the context of the fight against antibiotic resistance as one of the major threats on the global health.

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