

MAKING THE SWITCH CHANGING FROM INTRAVENOUS TO ORAL ANTIBIOTICS

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

Why do we give your child antibiotics?

Antibiotics are medicines used to treat infections caused by bacteria, and these infections are commonly seen in patients needing treatment in hospital.

To manage serious bacterial infections, antibiotics are often given intravenously or “IV” (meaning through the vein via a drip) to begin. This is an effective way to get antibiotics into the blood system quickly, and reach the site of infection.

IV antibiotics may also be used if:

- It is not possible or difficult to give antibiotics by mouth (e.g. difficulty swallowing)
- There are problems absorbing medicines from the stomach (e.g. vomiting)
- There are no antibiotics available that can be given by mouth for a particular infection

When is it safe to switch to oral antibiotics?

In many common infections treated in hospitals, patients can, and should be, switched from IV to oral antibiotics. There are special criteria and checklists to make the right decisions about when it is safe and suitable to switch to oral antibiotics. This includes when:

- The patient is stable and their condition is improving (e.g. body temperature is getting back to normal)
- Other medicines can be taken by mouth without problems
- There are no problems with absorbing medicines taken by mouth
- The antibiotic needed is available in an oral form. In most cases this will be a syrup. If a syrup formulation is not available, tablets or capsules may be given instead. Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist can show you how to give this (e.g. crush tablet, dissolve in water), or teach your child how to swallow tablets and capsules whole.

- The patient is likely to be able to take the full course of antibiotics
- You understand the plan to change to an oral antibiotic and you are able to help where required.

Your child’s doctor will look at the need for IV antibiotics every day, and will talk to you about this. Please feel free to ask more questions if you have concerns about your child’s medicines.

Why should we switch to oral antibiotics?

Taking medicines by mouth (orally) is the safest and easiest way to take most medicines. Every effort is made to switch patients to oral medicines as soon as possible.

The benefits of giving medicines orally include that:

- There is no need for an IV line or drip
- Your child may not need as many needles
- It is more comfortable
- There is less risk of irritation or infection from the line or drip
- Your child may be able to go home sooner

Generally, serious side effects from oral antibiotics are less common.



What are the risks of switching to oral antibiotics?

There is a small chance the infection may get worse if oral antibiotics do not work. If this happens, your child may be given IV antibiotics again. If you have already gone home, you may need to come back to the hospital.

What are the side effects of antibiotics?

Antibiotics can cause side effects, however, when antibiotics are necessary, the benefits far outweigh the risks.

Side effects can include stomach problems like diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting. Taking antibiotics, intravenously or orally, can affect the normal good gut bacteria.

For some children, probiotics may help to restore good gut bacteria; speak to your doctor for more information.

Less common, but more serious, side effects can be allergic reactions, such as hives (large, red, raised areas on the skin), fever and breathing problems.

If your child experiences any of these, stop taking the antibiotic and seek medical attention. The Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflet that normally comes with the medicine also lists the most common side effects.

You are part of the team making this decision

At this hospital, we encourage staff to provide parents and carers with information on antibiotics prescribed for their child, including when and why it has been started, potential side effects, the treatment plan and options, so you can help make decisions about your child's treatment.

If you have not been involved in these discussions, and wish to know more about your child's antibiotic treatment plan, please ask your hospital doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Making the switch: Changing from intravenous to oral antibiotics
Information for parents and carers
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What you need to know before your child goes home

If your child has been given oral antibiotics to take at home, it is important that you follow the doctor's advice on when, how, and for how long your child should take them.

You can use the checklist below to make sure you have the information you need to keep giving antibiotics at home.

Checklist

- Name of the antibiotic
- How much of the antibiotic to give your child. Plastic syringes or measuring cups should be used to measure liquid medicines.
- The times of day you need to give the antibiotic to your child
- If the antibiotic needs to be given on an empty stomach, or with food
- How many days to give the antibiotic for
- What to do if your child has a reaction to the antibiotic
- What to do if your child's condition worsens
- Who to call if you've gone home and you're worried about your child
- When you need to see your doctor again

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About the Quality Use of Antimicrobials in Healthcare Program

The CEC's Quality Use of Antimicrobials in Healthcare program aims to help NSW public hospitals develop ways of ensuring antibiotics are used properly and responsibly to improve patient care.

For further information on the program, please visit

<http://www.cec.health.nsw.gov.au>