

PRESS RELEASE

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BLUEGRASS FAMILY HEALTH STEPS-UP STATEWIDE IMMUNIZATION / ANTIBIOTIC EDUCATION EFFORT

LEXINGTON, KY – *Bluegrass Family Health*, in conjunction with KACC - the Kentucky Antibiotic Conservation Coalition - has joined with the Kentucky Health Department to pilot an expanded two-pronged statewide program geared to increase immunizations of Kentuckians against the flu and pneumonia, and to educate them on the proper and prudent use of antibiotics for upper respiratory infections.

Many of the upper respiratory infections that people suffer are caused by viruses, which last for a limited period of time regardless of the treatment selected.

“It is quite common that when a sick person has a virus, they ask the doctor for and often get antibiotics, when all they really need is treatment of the symptoms,” says Timothy E. Sawyers, Pharmacy Consultant for *Bluegrass Family Health*.

“The emphasis of the education stresses that the use of antibiotics for viral illness creates antibiotic resistant strains of the bacteria. This makes treating these resistant strains more and more difficult,” he continued.

Clinical Coordinator of Pharmacy Programs for *Bluegrass Family Health*, Kimberly Broyles, PharmD, added further emphasis.

“Immunization is the best form of defense against the flu and has been proven to decrease the severity of infections. Antibiotics are NOT effective against viral infections and they should NOT be used to treat the flu,” she said.

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) and other public health agencies have recommended appropriate antibiotic use for upper respiratory infections to stop the growing problem of antibiotic resistance. The objectives of this program are to:

- Promote influenza and pneumococcal vaccinations throughout Kentucky with an emphasis on high-risk patients.
- Educate patients about the appropriate use of antibiotics in respiratory infections and redefine their expectations for antibiotic therapy through educational materials.
- Provide non-antibiotic alternatives for suspected viral infections
- Increase the use of first-line antibiotics, in lieu of second line agents
- Reduce or limit the use of second-line agents to situations where indicated

“According to the Department of Public Health, Kentucky lags behind the national immunization rate,” adds Sawyers. “If we can get more people immunized, and reduce the instance of over-using antibiotics, then our arsenal of antibiotics would be more effective.”

Sawyers emphasizes public awareness must be raised to make immunizations against viral diseases the “front-line” of the attack, which he says would reduce both the viral diseases and the increase in antibiotic resistance. *Bluegrass Family Health*, KACC and public health officials say this “cycle” increases “cross-resistance” by bacteria against antibiotics. Cross-resistance is when bacteria develop antibiotic resistance to a family of antibiotics through over-exposure to one member of that family.

“The problem is especially acute with children,” says Sawyers. “When a worried parent seeks medical treatment for their child who is sick with a virus, the doctor is under tremendous pressure to prescribe something to help the child. At that point, it is difficult to explain to the parent that the only thing that should be done is to treat the child’s symptoms until the disease runs its course.

KACC is made up of: Abbott Laboratories, the Center for Disease Control (CDC), CHA and United HealthCare.

There are a variety of free educational materials developed by the CDC and Abbott Laboratories available for distribution through health providers for their patients. Health providers are urged to contact their Abbott representative to make arrangements for delivery of these materials.

Bluegrass Family Health is a Health Maintenance Organization serving more than 106,500 health care recipients in 92 of Kentucky’s 120 counties. *Bluegrass Family Health* offers HMO, POS and PPO plans and has more than 4,000 contracted physicians and 76 hospitals serving Central and Eastern Kentucky, as well as, areas across Western Kentucky.