



Antibiotics are medicines that work by killing bacteria or stopping infections from growing

- Most of the time, your child's immune system can protect them against harmful bacteria. However, antibiotics are sometimes required to control infections that are unlikely to get better by themselves without treatment.
- It's very important that you carefully follow the instructions on how much antibiotic to give (the dose), when to give it and for how long. This helps to make sure the antibiotic will work, both now and in the future (if your child needs it again); antibiotics can stop working for everyone if we don't use them properly.



Have you told your doctor about any previous reactions your child has had when taking medicines?

It is important they're aware of this information so they can select the safest antibiotic for your child.

Advice for using antibiotics well and storing them correctly:

- ✓ **Follow all instructions on the label.** Some liquid antibiotics need to be kept in the fridge (make sure it doesn't freeze). Otherwise keep the antibiotics away from sunlight and heat.
- ✓ **Take care that your child can't see or reach the antibiotics when not being used and the lid is on correctly.** The added flavouring in some liquid antibiotics may make them appealing to drink.
- ✓ **If a dose is missed, give it as soon as you remember,** unless it's nearly time for the next dose (in which case they can skip it)
- ✓ **If you accidentally give an extra dose, don't worry,** but it may mean that your child is more likely to have some of the common side effects (read more about this below)
- ✓ **Give your child the full course of antibiotics prescribed,** even if they start feeling better
- ✓ **Remember that the antibiotic is just for the child who it is prescribed for, and should only be used to treat the infection they have at the time.** Don't give the antibiotic to any other child in the house.



Tips for giving liquid antibiotics to children:

- ✓ **Equipment:** Use a plastic syringe, dropper or medicine measuring cup to get the exact amount of antibiotic written on the label for each dose; don't use a kitchen spoon or regular cup.
- ✓ **Position:** Give the antibiotic while the child is seated or supported upright, not lying down
- ✓ **Giving the antibiotic with a syringe/dropper:**
 - Place the syringe tip just past the teeth or gums
 - Slowly push down the plunger (or squeeze the dropper end), aiming for inside of the cheek. Don't squirt the medicine at the back of the throat as this can cause coughing/choking.
- ✓ **Spilling/vomiting:** Don't give extra antibiotic if a small amount is spilled. If they vomit straight after giving the dose, you can try giving the full dose again later.
- ✓ **Issues with flavour:** Have a drink or food close by to give after they take the antibiotic to help with the taste. Letting your child suck on a small ice block/cube first to numb their taste buds can also help.
- ✓ **Wash the equipment (e.g. syringe) straight after use**



Extra tips for babies/infants:

- ✓ Give the dose before feeding, if possible; sometimes babies may refuse the antibiotic if they are not hungry
- ✓ Don't mix the antibiotic into your baby's bottle because if it isn't finished they won't get the right dose. Mixing antibiotics with a small amount of milk/fluid may sometimes be okay but ask your pharmacist first.
- ✓ Role playing may be helpful; pretend to give their favourite teddy some first if that helps. For older children, explaining why the antibiotic is needed might help.
- ✓ Keep calm, positive and firm, but don't force a dose into their mouth. Take a break and try again in half an hour.

Antibiotics can have side effects

Most of the time antibiotics don't cause noticeable side effects, or if they do, they're mild. If the antibiotic makes your child feel worse or you're worried about new symptoms, talk to your doctor, nurse, pharmacist or call Healthline (0800 611 116).

Common side effects include:



Nausea
(feeling sick)



Diarrhoea
(loose or watery bowel motions)



Mild abdominal pain (sore tummy)

Talk to a healthcare professional as soon as you can if you notice these side effects:



Rash particularly if it starts spreading or seems severe (see below)



Thrush (white/yellow tongue)



Serious side effects are rare

Get immediate medical help (call 111 or go to the hospital) if your child has:

- **Severe or bloody diarrhoea** (or other significant bleeding)
- **A severe allergic reaction** (e.g. swelling, wheezing or difficulty breathing, rashes that feel hot, itchy or are blistering)



For further information, see: [healthify.nz/medicines-a-z/a/antibiotics/](https://www.healthify.nz/medicines-a-z/a/antibiotics/) and [healthify.nz/medicines-a-z/m/medicines-babies-children/](https://www.healthify.nz/medicines-a-z/m/medicines-babies-children/)