Antimicrobial resistance – frequently asked questions

1. What is antimicrobial resistance?
Antibiotics are medicines that kill or interfere with the growth of bacteria. Antibiotic resistance is when bacteria are no longer killed by an antibiotic – instead they continue to grow and multiply in its presence. It threatens the prevention and treatment of a range of infections caused by bacteria, ranging from sinus infections and food poisoning to meningitis and pneumonia.

2. What are the effects of antimicrobial resistance?
Antibiotic resistance makes it more difficult and expensive to treat infections. It can lead to longer hospital stays and higher medical costs, and even increased rates of mortality.

If resistance trends continue, common surgical operations such as hip and knee replacements will become far riskier. Life-saving treatments (e.g. chemotherapy for cancer; dialysis for kidney failure) themselves become life-threatening as they suppress the immune system and expose already vulnerable patients to the dangers of resistant infections. Without urgent action, globally we are heading for an era where common infections and minor injuries could once again kill.

3. What is the cause of antimicrobial resistance?
There are several things which can lead to increasing resistance of antibiotics. This can include:
- Over-prescription of antibiotics – around half of all antibiotics are prescribed for the wrong reasons.\(^1\)
- Not finishing a full course of antibiotics.
- Sharing or using leftover antibiotics.
- Poor hygiene and sanitation.

4. What can you do to stop it?
There are several actions that can be taken to better protect people against antimicrobial resistance.

- **Individuals can:**
  - Only use antibiotics when prescribed by clinicians in line with current guidelines.
  - Not requesting antibiotics when clinicians advise they are not needed.
  - Prevent infection by washing hands, preparing food hygienically, avoiding close contact with sick people, keeping vaccinations up to date.

- **Businesses can:**
  - Strengthen infection prevention and control measures.
  - Improve reporting and surveillance of antibiotic-resistant infections.
  - Making information available on the impact of antibiotic resistance.

5. What are Bupa and the Global CMO Network doing about this?
Members of the Global Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Network have signed a pledge that urges companies to support the appropriate use of antibiotics, as resistance is on the rise.

The CMO Network is a group of some of the world’s leading employers, powered by Bupa. Companies in the CMO Network employ around eight million people combined. Each signatory has committed to playing their part to help dramatically reduce the volume of antibiotics which are misused and, in turn, slow resistance among their workforce.

\(^{1}\) [http://www.who.int/mediacentre/commentaries/stop-antibiotic-resistance/en](http://www.who.int/mediacentre/commentaries/stop-antibiotic-resistance/en)