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WHO adds medicines for hepatitis C, HIV, tuberculosis and cancer to Essential Medicines list

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The updated list adds 30 medicines for adults and 25 for children, and specifies new uses for 9 already-listed products, bringing the total to 433 drugs deemed essential for addressing the most important public health needs



WHO experts have grouped antibiotics into three categories – ACCESS, WATCH and RESERVE. New advice on which antibiotics to use for common infections and which to preserve for the most serious circumstances is among the additions to the WHO Model list of essential medicines for 2017. Other additions include medicines for HIV, hepatitis C, tuberculosis and leukaemia.

The updated list adds 30 medicines for adults and 25 for children, and specifies new uses for 9 already-listed products, bringing the total to 433 drugs deemed essential for addressing the most important public health needs. The WHO Essential Medicines List (EML) is used by many countries to increase access to medicines and guide decisions about which products they ensure are available for their populations.

Dr Marie-Paule Kieny, WHO Assistant Director-General for Health Systems and Innovation said, "Safe and effective medicines are an essential part of any health system. Making sure all people can access the medicines they need, when and where they need them, is vital to countries' progress towards universal health coverage."

WHO recommends that antibiotics in the ACCESS group be available at all times as treatments for a wide range of common infections. For example, it includes amoxicillin, a widely-used antibiotic to treat infections such as pneumonia.

The WATCH group includes antibiotics that are recommended as first- or second-choice treatments for a small number of infections. For example, the use of ciprofloxacin, used to treat cystitis (a type of urinary tract infection) and upper respiratory tract infections (such as bacterial sinusitis and bacterial bronchitis), should be dramatically reduced to avoid further development of resistance.

The third group, RESERVE, includes antibiotics such as colistin and some cephalosporins that should be considered last-resort options, and used only in the most severe circumstances when all other alternatives have failed, such as for life-threatening infections due to multidrug-resistant bacteria.