

Patients with a cough are told to reach for HONEY instead of calling their GP for antibiotics as doctors are warned against prescribing the medicine

- **New health advice says drugs should not be the first line of treatment for coughs**
- **Experts are worried doctors too often dole out antibiotics for coughs and colds**
- **Patients should try honey or over-the-counter cough syrups instead**

People suffering from a cough should drink honey and lemon rather than take antibiotics, official new health advice has declared.

It insists that drugs should not be the first line of treatment for coughs.

The advice, published today by **NHS** watchdog Nice and Public Health England, has been drawn up as part of the battle against superbugs.

Experts are increasingly worried that doctors too often dole out antibiotics for viral coughs and colds, for which they are rarely necessary. The over-use of these drugs means superbugs are evolving to resist treatment – making antibiotics useless against more serious infections.

The new draft guidelines, which are aimed at both GPs and patients, say antibiotics make little difference to cough symptoms.

Instead, patients should try honey or over-the-counter cough syrups. The advice will undergo one month's consultation before being sent to GPs.

Dr Tessa Lewis, of Nice, said: 'In the committee's view, taking a spoonful of honey or a honey and lemon drink is a good first step a person can take for self-treatment for a cough. Honey is a natural remedy which has been tried and tested for generations. Some people really believe in its benefits.

'We believe it is one treatment option which could be used by people in the first instance to reduce cough. A trial suggests honey can reduce the severity and frequency of cough after a day but doesn't have a significant effect on sleep quality for parents and children.'

Nice cited a 2014 study of 568 people which found a 10g spoonful of honey significantly reduced the frequency and severity of coughs within a day. Dr Lewis stressed that babies under one year of age should never be given honey because of the risk of infant botulism. But she added that most coughs can be dealt with without contacting a GP.