

A jar of honey is better for coughs than antibiotics

By Laura Donnelly HEALTH EDITOR

PATIENTS with a bad cough should buy a jar of honey rather than visit their doctor, new guidance for the NHS says.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Nice) and Public Health England (PHE) urge people to buy "self care" products such as honey, herbal remedies and cough medicines, instead of requesting antibiotics.

Nice adviser Dr Tessa Lewis said: "If someone has a runny nose, sore throat and cough, we would expect the cough to settle over two to three weeks and antibiotics are not needed.

"People can check their symptoms on NHS Choices or NHS Direct Wales or ask their pharmacist for advice.

"If the cough is getting worse rather than better, or the person feels very unwell or breathless, then they would need to contact their GP."

The advice highlighted research showing honey significantly reduced the frequency and severity of coughs compared to placebo treatments.

It also found some evidence that medicines containing pelargonium, a herbal remedy often known as Kaloba, could help relieve symptoms.

And it said over-the-counter medicines containing the expectorant guaifenesin or the suppressant dextromethorphan could also bring relief.

Both are active ingredients in a number of remedies including Benylin.

Health watchdogs say antibiotics should be reserved for cases which linger, or when a person is at risk of further complications if their health is already compromised.

As many as one in five GP prescriptions for antibiotics may be inappropriate, according to research published by PHE earlier this year.

Dr Susan Hopkins, from PHE, said: "Antibiotic resistance is a huge problem and we need to take action now to reduce antibiotic use.

"Taking antibiotics when you don't need them puts you and your family at risk of developing infections which in turn cannot be easily treated."

Prof Mark Baker, director of the centre for guidelines at Nice, said: "We are keen to highlight that, in most cases, antibiotics will not be necessary to treat a cough. We want people to be offered advice on alternatives that may help ease their symptoms."