

# Bronchiectasis (non-cystic fibrosis), acute exacerbation: antimicrobial prescribing

Information for the public

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## Bronchiectasis: do I need antibiotics?

Bronchiectasis is a condition that causes mucus to build up inside the lungs. The main symptoms are persistent coughing to bring up the mucus (phlegm), and feeling short of breath. People with bronchiectasis are more prone to lung infections.

It's fairly common for symptoms to suddenly get worse than usual – this is called an exacerbation or a flare-up, and it may mean you have an infection.

Flare-ups can cause more damage to the lungs so it's important you get treatment. You should be offered antibiotics for any bacterial infection in your lungs.

Although everyone needs antibiotics when they have a flare-up, not everyone needs them to prevent flare-ups. Using antibiotics when they are not needed means they may not work as well in the future. This is a serious health risk.

But if you get lots of flare-ups, your specialist might suggest taking antibiotics every day for a while to see if this helps.

## Starting antibiotics

Your health professional should explain that antibiotics can cause side effects, such as diarrhoea and nausea (feeling sick).

You should see your doctor if your symptoms suddenly get worse at any time or you feel extremely unwell. They may refer you to hospital if you have signs of a serious illness.

## Where can I find out more?

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your health professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

The NHS website has more information about:

- [bronchiectasis](#) and
- [antibiotics](#).

We have also written information on [why antibiotics should be used wisely](#).

We wrote this guideline with health professionals and members of the public. All the recommendations are based on the best research available.

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