

# 'Little Bug Busters' toolkit

Reducing antibiotic use and signposting parents to the Healthier Together app for advice 11/08/25 V4

The North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) has developed the **Little Bug Busters** toolkit to support NHS and local authority communications leads, GP practices and community pharmacies to help reduce the unnecessary use of antibiotics in young children and signposting parents and carers to the [Healthier Together](#) website for advice.

The NHS Performance Assessment Framework for 2025/26, has introduced a new patient safety measure to monitor how often children are prescribed antibiotics in primary care. This measure is part of the quality and inequalities metrics, overseen by ICBs - [NHS England » The NHS Performance Assessment Framework for 2025/26](#)

The goal is to ensure antibiotics are used appropriately, as overuse can lead to antibiotic resistance, making infections harder to treat. By tracking this data, the NHS aims to promote safer prescribing and protect children's health.

ICBs will use this information to identify areas where prescribing practices can be improved, ensuring that antibiotics are given only when necessary and in the correct dosage. This initiative is part of a wider effort to enhance patient safety and reduce health inequalities across the NHS.

The following toolkit provides content aimed at parents and carers and is designed for sharing across NHS partner social media and other communication channels. [Download the online toolkit here XXXXXXXXXXXXX](#)



## Common illnesses

Children often get common illnesses like coughs, sore throats, and earaches – especially at school or nursery. These are usually caused by viruses, not bacteria, and most children, with a healthy immune system and up to date vaccinations, will get better on their own with rest, fluids, and care at home without needing antibiotics. Using antibiotics too often can lead to antibiotic resistance. This means that in the future, they might not work as well when they're really needed for more serious infections.

Our **Little Bug Busters** campaign signposts parents and carers to the [Healthier Together](#) website, for medical advice and help, to learn how to manage everyday childhood illnesses without relying on antibiotics.

## Campaign Aims

- Help to reduce the use of antibiotics, when not needed, for common childhood illnesses like coughs, earache, and sore throats.
- Signpost parents and carers to [Healthier Together](#) website – for information and advice on how to care for common illnesses at home, and when it's time to speak to a GP, call NHS 111, or head to urgent care or A&E.
- Address the NHSE new patient safety indicator in ICB assessment frameworks - Percentage of children prescribed antibiotics in primary care - [NHS England » The NHS Performance Assessment Framework for 2025/26](#)

## Key messages antibiotics

- Most coughs, colds, fever and sore throats get better without antibiotics
- Using antibiotics when they are not needed means they might not work when they are.
- Know when to seek urgent help and when self-care is safest
- Your GP will only prescribe antibiotics if they are really needed – to protect your child now and in the future.

### Additional key messages Healthier Together

- Parents and carers should always trust their instincts. If their child has other health problems, or if they are worried about their symptoms, don't hesitate to get medical advice.
- Helpful information including how to care for a child at home, symptoms to look out for, when to speak to a pharmacist or GP, call 111 or go to a UTC or A&E, is available on the NHS [Healthier Together](#) website.

### Toolkit content – download the online toolkit here XXXXXXXXXXXXX

- Social media messaging and visuals
- Press release
- Copy for websites/ newsletters/bulletins
- Printable posters

### Audience

- Nurseries
- Schools
- Community pharmacies
- Midwives
- GP practices
- Social prescribers

## Social media

Please tag us in your social media posts

Use **#BugBusters #HereToHelp**

**Facebook** - NorthEastandNorthCumbriaNHS

**X** – @NENC\_NHS


**Instagram** – nenc\_nhs

**TikTok** - @nenc\_icb


**Linked-In** - @north-east-and-north-cumbria-nhs

**YouTube** - North East and North Cumbria NHS

### #Little Bug Busters

<p>1. Not sure what to do when your child is unwell?</p> <p><b>Antibiotics aren't always the answer!</b></p> <p>Know when and where to seek urgent help and when self-care is best</p> <p>📱 <b>Download the <a href="#">Healthier Together</a> app!</b></p> <p>It helps you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✅ Check your child's symptoms</li> <li>✅ See easy-to-follow advice with pictures</li> <li>✅ Use a simple traffic light system ( ● ● ● ) to know if you need to see a doctor – or if it's safe to care for them at home.</li> </ul> <p>💡 Learn when antibiotics do and don't help <a href="#">here</a></p> <p><b>#LittleBugBusters #HereToHelp</b></p>	
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<p>2.</p>	<p>Not sure what to do when your child is unwell? <b>Antibiotics aren't always the answer!</b></p> <p>Most children's coughs, colds, fever and sore throats get better without antibiotics.</p> <p><b>Know when to seek urgent help and when self-care is safest</b></p> <p> <b>Download the <a href="#">Healthier Together</a> app!</b></p> <p>It helps parents and carers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Check their child's symptoms</li> <li>✓ See easy-to-follow advice with pictures</li> <li>✓ Use a simple traffic light system Red ●, Amber ●, Green ● to know when and where to get help.</li> </ul> <p>💡 Find out more about antibiotic use <a href="#">here</a></p> <p><b>#LittleBugBusters #HereToHelp</b></p>	
<p>3.</p>	<p>Not sure what to do when your child is unwell? <b>Antibiotics aren't always the answer!</b></p> <p><b>Using antibiotics when they are not needed means they might not work when they are!</b></p> <p>Know when to seek urgent help for your child and when selfcare is best – <b>download the <a href="#">Healthier Together</a> app!</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Check your child's symptoms</li> <li>✓ See easy-to-follow advice with pictures</li> <li>✓ Use an easy Red ●, Amber ●, Green ● system to know if you need to get help – and where to go!</li> </ul> <p>💡 Find out more about antibiotic use click <a href="#">here</a></p> <p><b>#LittleBugBusters #HereToHelp</b></p>	

<p>4. <b>Antibiotics aren't always the answer!</b></p> <p><b>Your GP will only prescribe antibiotics if they are really needed – to protect your child now and in the future.</b></p> <p>Let's save antibiotics for when they're really needed - for more serious infections! 🧊</p> <p>Know when to seek urgent help for your child and when selfcare is safest – <b>download the <a href="#">Healthier Together</a> app!</b> It helps you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>🔍 Check your child's symptoms</li> <li>🖼️ Find easy-to-follow advice with pictures</li> <li>🚦 Use a traffic light guide to know when to get help – and where to go!</li> </ul> <p>Find out more about antibiotics <a href="#">here</a></p> <p><b>#LittleBugBusters #HereToHelp</b></p>	 <p>The poster is titled 'LITTLE BUG BUSTERS!' in large, bubbly letters. It features a young child with their hand over their mouth, suggesting a cough or sneeze. The NHS logo is in the top right corner. Below the title, it says 'Your GP will only prescribe antibiotics if they're really needed – to protect your child now and in the future.' At the bottom, a pink arrow points to the right with the text 'HERE TO HELP' and 'To check your child's symptoms use the Healthier Together app.'</p>
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## Press release (draft)

### Antibiotics aren't always the answer

Parents are being urged to help their children get better from everyday coughs, sore throats and earaches – without asking their GP for antibiotics.

The NHS in the North East and North Cumbria has launched its 'Little Bug Busters' campaign helping raise awareness of antibiotic use and signposting parents to healthcare advice and support for childhood illnesses on the [Healthier Together](#) app.

Doctors and pharmacists are reminding parents that many common illnesses are caused by viruses, not bacteria, which means antibiotics won't make any difference – and are often not needed.

Dr Neil O'Brien, chief medical officer, North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB), said: "It's completely normal for children to pick up coughs, colds and ear infections, especially when they're around other children at nursery or in school.

"The good news is, in most cases, children with a healthy immune system and up-to-date vaccinations are 'little bug busters' and with rest, plenty of fluids and care at home, they'll often feel better soon – antibiotics don't usually speed things up."

Health experts are also reminding families that using antibiotics too often can lead to antibiotic resistance - this means that in the future, antibiotics might not work as well when they're really needed for more serious infections.

Professor Ewan Maule, ICB clinical director of medicines, added: "We know it can be worrying when your child is poorly, but most of these common illnesses get better on their own. Antibiotics can cause side effects like diarrhoea or rashes, so it's best to keep them for when they're really needed."

The NHS is signposting parents towards its [Healthier Together](#) website – which offers information and advice on checking your child's symptoms, with handy pictures and tips on self-care, and a simple traffic light guide to know when to get help – and where to go!

Professor Maule added: "We all want to do the right thing when our little ones are poorly.



"Sometimes that means getting advice on how to treat common illnesses, visiting a pharmacy for some over-the-counter medicine, or sometimes it just means letting children's own 'bug busting' immune system take care of things naturally.

"That said, if your child has an existing health condition or they're not getting better, don't hesitate to get help - but most of the time, rest, fluids and care at home is the best medicine of all."

For more information antibiotics click [here](#).

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## Newsletter article

### Little bug busters - helping little ones feel better without antibiotics

If your child has a sniffle, a cough, or a sore throat, it's natural to worry and want to help them feel better fast – but antibiotics aren't always the answer.

Across the North East and North Cumbria, the NHS has launched its Little Bug Busters campaign, helping parents understand when children really need antibiotics and when self-care is best!

Most common illnesses are caused by viruses, not bacteria, so antibiotics usually aren't unnecessary and won't work.

The good news is that children with a healthy immune system, and up to date vaccinations, are little bug busters and usually bounce back quickly with rest, plenty of fluids, and care at home. Antibiotics won't make them feel better any faster and can sometimes cause side effects like tummy troubles or rashes. Overuse can also lead to antibiotic resistance - making them less effective when they are really needed for more serious illnesses.



The NHS is advising parents and carers to visit its [Healthier Together](#) website, or download the app, where they can find advice on how to check their child's symptoms, treat many common illnesses, and know when it's time to get extra help from a GP, pharmacist, NHS 111, or go to urgent care or A&E.

So next time your little one catches a bug, remember most of the time, they're brilliant little bug busters all on their own and with rest, fluids, and a little time, they'll be back to their usual self in no time—no antibiotics needed!

Download the [Healthier Together](#) app today and feel confident caring for your child's health.

For more information on antibiotic use click [here](#).

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Additional assets		
Posters	TBA	<div>     </div> <div> LittleBugBusters-A4 -03.pdf LittleBugBusters-A4 -02.pdf LittleBugBusters-A4 -01.pdf LittleBugBusters-A4 -04.pdf </div>