

'Little Bug Busters' toolkit

Reducing antibiotic use and signposting parents to the Healthier Together app for advice 19/08/25 V5

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 download the app [Healthier Together](#) 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: Little Bug Busters](#)



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 download the [Healthier Together](#) app, 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 download the [Healthier Together](#) app – 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 by downloading the NHS [Healthier Together](#) app.

Toolkit content – download here [Little Bug Busters](#)

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

Audience

- Nurseries
- Schools
- Community pharmacies
- GP practices
- NHS Foundation Trust communication teams
- Midwives
- Social prescribers
- Paediatric pharmacists
- Local authority public health communications teams

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	
1.	Antibiotics aren't always the answer! Most coughs, colds, fever and sore throats get better without antibiotics. Not sure what to do when your child is unwell?  Download the Healthier Together app! It helps you: ✓ Check your child's symptoms ✓ See easy-to-follow advice with pictures ✓ 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. 💡 Learn when antibiotics do and don't help here #LittleBugBusters #HereToHelp



2.	Antibiotics aren't always the answer! Not sure what to do when your child is unwell? Know when to seek urgent help and when self-care is safest 📱 Download the Healthier Together app! It helps parents and carers: ✅ Check their child's symptoms ✅ See easy-to-follow advice with pictures ✅ Use a simple traffic light system Red ●, Amber ●, Green ● to know when and where to get help. 💡 Find out more about antibiotic use here #LittleBugBusters #HereToHelp	 NHS LITTLE BUG BUSTERS! Know when to seek urgent help – and when self-care is safest. To check your child's symptoms use the Healthier Together app. HERE TO HELP
3.	Not sure what to do when your child is unwell? Antibiotics aren't always the answer! Using antibiotics when they are not needed means they might not work when they are! Know when to seek urgent help for your child and when selfcare is best – download the Healthier Together app! ✅ Check your child's symptoms ✅ See easy-to-follow advice with pictures ✅ Use an easy Red ●, Amber ●, Green ● system to know if you need to get help – and where to go! 💡 Find out more about antibiotic use click here #LittleBugBusters #HereToHelp	 NHS LITTLE BUG BUSTERS! Using antibiotics when they're not needed means they might not work when they are. To check your child's symptoms use the Healthier Together app. HERE TO HELP

4.	Antibiotics aren't always the answer! Healthcare professionals will only prescribe antibiotics if they are really needed – to protect your child now and in the future. Let's save antibiotics for more serious infections! 💊 Know when to seek urgent help for your child and when selfcare is best – download the Healthier Together app! It helps you: 🔍 Check your child's symptoms 🖼️ Find easy-to-follow advice with pictures 🚦 Use a traffic light guide to know when to get help – and where to go! Find out more about antibiotics here #LittleBugBusters #HereToHelp	 The poster is titled 'LITTLE BUG BUSTERS!' in large, bubbly letters. It features the NHS logo in the top right corner. Below the title, it says: 'Healthcare professionals will only prescribe antibiotics if they're really needed – to protect your child now and in the future.' At the bottom, a pink banner says: 'To check your child's symptoms use the Healthier Together app.' with a button that says 'HERE TO HELP'. A young boy is shown on the right side of the poster, covering his mouth with his hand.
SMS text messaging for GP Practices		
1	Most children's coughs, colds & sore throats get better on their own. Antibiotics aren't always needed . Check their symptoms & get safe advice on the Healthier Together app Healthier Together	
2	Not sure if your child needs a doctor? ✅ Check their symptoms & get safe advice on the Healthier Together app - Healthier Together	

3	Antibiotics don't work for most coughs & colds. Rest, fluids & care at home often do. Check your child's symptoms & get safe advice with the Healthier Together app - Healthier Together	
4	Worried about your child's cough, fever or sore throat? See when self-care is enough & when to get help on the Healthier Together app	

Press release (draft)

Antibiotics aren't always the answer

Parents are being encouraged to help their children get better from everyday coughs, sore throats and earaches – and to understand when antibiotics will and won't work in helping their child recover.

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 by downloading the NHS [Healthier Together](#) app.

Both GPs and pharmacists can now prescribe antibiotics, when they're really needed, for specific conditions, but 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](#).

Ends

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.

Parents and carers are being advised to visit the NHS's [Healthier Together](#) website, or download the app [Healthier Together](#), 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	Little Bug Busters	
Radio ad	 NEW 70092 NHS - Little Bug Busters O	