

Antibiotic Prophylaxis

Preventative antibiotics prior to some dental procedures is recommended for high-risk patients who are predisposed to bacteremia-induced infections. Certain procedures, such as root canals or extractions, can cause bacteria to enter the bloodstream. Dentists often pre-treat patients who may be at risk of developing infective endocarditis (IE), an infection of the inner tissues of the heart, with antibiotics prior to invasive dental procedures to prevent infection.

Previous guidelines suggest to use preventative antibiotics for numerous heart-related conditions, as well as for individuals who have prosthetic joints. However, the guidelines have changed over time as newer research has shown that preventative antibiotics has little benefit, and may even pose greater risks for patients.

As problems with resistant organisms grow and we learn more about antibiotic resistance, new guidelines are altering the way patients are treated. According to the American Dental Association, “The guidelines are based on a growing body of scientific evidence that shows the risks of taking preventive antibiotics outweigh the benefits for most patients. . . . Inappropriate use of antibiotics can also lead to the development of drug-resistant bacteria.” A more conservative approach to preventative antibiotics is now recommended.

Guidelines now suggest only those people with the highest risk of developing infective endocarditis should take preventative antibiotics, including those who have a prosthetic heart valve, had a valve repair with prosthetic material, who have certain kinds of congenital heart disease or defects, and those with a prior history of IE.

Underlying cardiac conditions are associated with the highest risk categories, but the decision whether or not short-term preventative antibiotics are needed should be determined on an individual, case by case basis. The American Dental Association recommends anyone who is at risk for developing IE should follow a good oral health program, which includes twice-yearly cleanings and twice daily brushing and flossing. A greater emphasis on good oral hygiene in all individuals, but most importantly high risk patients, and less focus on antibiotic prophylaxis, can help prevent antibiotic resistance and most importantly, lead to long-term oral health. Always consult with your dentist and health care provider before any procedure to determine the best treatment options for you.