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Antibiotic therapy in acute bronchitis

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Background & Aim: Acute bronchitis (AB) is one of the most common diseases that a family doctor has contact with. It's defined by the presence of cough lasting more than five days, but less than 3 weeks, which can be associated with sputum production. In some cases wheezing is also present. The vast majority of patients with this condition is treated with antibiotics. The aim of this paper is to determine if antibiotics should be use to treat AB.

Method: PubMed, Ovid and Cochrane database search using "acute bronchitis" and "bronchitis". We selected all the systematic reviews and meta-analysis published in the last 3 years. of the total 94 studies we found we've selected, after reading the abstract, 12 papers. All the studies excluded were so because they didn't refer to the effectiveness of antibiotic treatment in AB.

Results: All the 12 studies show that antibiotic treatment has no effect on the cure rate of AB, because the vast majority of AB are caused by virus. Even when the etiology of AB is a bacteria, the wide spread of antibiotics for this disease have an unfavorable risk-benefit ratio. In those cases the agent involved is generally Bordetella pertussis, Chlamydomphila pneumoniae or Mycoplasma pneumoniae.

Conclusions: Based of the studies considered in this review, antibiotic treatment is not recommended to treat the majority of cases of AB. The antibiotics should be used only when we are certain that the etiology of the disease is a bacteria, but the tests to confirm it besides being expensive have also low sensitivity and specificity values. So in conclusion the treatment of AB should be symptomatic.

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