



Supporting heart kids  
through life

## The use of antibiotics before dental visit

It is important to understand if your child still requires to be given antibiotics before dental treatment. In 2008, new guidelines on the use of prophylaxis antibiotics for the prevention of bacterial endocarditis were published in New Zealand. Here is a brief summary of the main points.

### Advice to prevent infective endocarditis

Advice from your dentist and doctor on how to best prevent infective endocarditis has changed. If you have been taking antibiotics for any dental work you may not need to take them any more. Please discuss any concerns with your dentist or doctor.

### What is infective endocarditis?

Infective endocarditis is a serious and potentially life-threatening illness. It is an infection of the heart valves or the lining of the heart. The infection gets to the heart when bacteria are carried there in the blood stream. Large numbers of bacteria may get into the blood stream in several ways, most commonly through the mouth and with dental work. Only some people with heart conditions need to take antibiotics for dental work to reduce their chance of getting this heart infection.

### Who should have antibiotic cover?

Infective endocarditis is rare but is more common in people with certain heart conditions. You are at risk of infective endocarditis and will need antibiotic cover if you have:

- ♥ Had a heart valve replacement (bio or mechanical)
- ♥ Rheumatic heart disease (rheumatic fever that has affected your heart)
- ♥ Had infective endocarditis before
- ♥ A heart condition you were born with that has been repaired in the last six months
- ♥ Unrepaired complex heart disease that you were born with (with or without shunts and conduits)

In the past, you may have had antibiotics for your heart condition but unless your heart condition is in the group of five above, you now no longer need antibiotic cover. This is because there is no clear evidence of benefit from antibiotics in such conditions. The risks of taking preventive antibiotics outweigh the benefits for most people.

### When should you have antibiotic cover?

You should have antibiotic cover for the following:

- ♥ Certain types of dental treatment (your dentist will know which treatments require cover)
- ♥ Any surgery anywhere in the body where there is already an infection.

You **do not** need antibiotics for losing your milk teeth, dental x-rays, work on orthodontic braces, anaesthetic injections, or biting/trauma to your lip or tongue.

### **Keeping your mouth healthy**

Keeping your teeth and gums healthy is a very important part of reducing your risk of developing infective endocarditis. If you don't look after your teeth, the chance of bacteria getting into your blood stream from your mouth is much higher than if you keep your teeth healthy.

You can reduce your risk of developing infective endocarditis by:

- ♥ Having dental check-ups every six months
- ♥ Brushing your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste
- ♥ Using dental floss daily to clean between your teeth.

If you are at risk of infective endocarditis, please carry an 'Advice to Prevent Infective Endocarditis' wallet card with you. Please ask your dentist, dental therapist or doctor for one of these cards.

*As always, please seek information that is case-specific to you (or if you are a heart parent, your child) directly from your own medical team.*

*The above article extracted from Wellington@Heart newsletter June 2012 has been reviewed by Wellington cardiologist Dr Andrew Aitken.*

