**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Childhood skin infections drive emergence of new antibiotic-resistant superbug in New Zealand**

**Under embargo until Wednesday 18 March 000H**

***(Wednesday, 18 March 2015 - Auckland):*** The treatment of childhood skin infections with antibiotic ointment is driving the spread of hospital superbugs, putting the lives of New Zealanders at risk, infectious disease experts warn today. Urgent action needs to be taken to regulate its use.

The statement is being made from the Australasian Society for Infectious Diseases (ASID) Annual Scientific Meeting in Auckland today.

"Our current use of topical antibiotics is endangering our antibiotic supply and putting lives at risk. We need to halt its unregulated use immediately before it’s too late,” says Clinical Microbiologist and lead researcher Dr Deborah Williamson from the University of Otago, who is presenting her research.

“Our unenviable experience in New Zealand should be a stark warning to other countries considering the unregulated use of topical antibiotics,” she says.

New Zealand has one of the highest incidences of *S. aureus* (sometimes referred to as Golden Staph) skin infections in the developed world, with tens of thousands of cases each year. *S. aureus* is a common bacterium that lives on the skin or in the nose and is spread by skin-on-skin contact or by touching contaminated surfaces. It can cause a range of mild to severe infections and may cause death but in New Zealand is most frequently seen in the form of skin infections such as boils, school sores and crusty ulcers in children. An antibiotic known as fusidic acid (Foban) applied to the skin as an ointment is the most common treatment for these.

Over the past decade, there has been a dramatic increase in skin infections in New Zealand and consequently an increase in the use of fusidic acid. The new study presented today shows that this use is not only increasing fusidic acid resistance, but more concerningly, is driving the emergence of a new multi drug resistant strain of *S. aureus* (MRSA), presenting a considerable threat to the health of New Zealanders.

MRSA is a serious superbug that can make common infections and minor injuries deadly because the antibiotics used to treat them no longer work. People can carry superbugs, which are transferred by contact, without having symptoms. People most at risk of a superbug infection are often hospital patients who are elderly or very sick, or who have an open wound, such as a bedsore, or a tube going into their body, such as a urinary catheter.

This study makes the link between our use of this antibiotic and the emergence of an MRSA that is being spread in the community, predominantly via children, rendering useless yet more of the antibiotics we have to tackle life threatening infections.

"The capacity to treat serious infections is really becoming less in all parts of the world," says Dr Williamson. "Without urgent, coordinated action by many stakeholders, the world is headed for a post-antibiotic era, in which common infections and minor injuries which have been treatable for decades can once again kill. Here in New Zealand we can now see directly that our treatment of childhood skin infections is threatening our precious supply of antibiotics. We have a responsibility to current and future generations to ensure the safe and responsible use of antibiotics."

**BACKGROUND**

**About the ASID ASM**

The ASID conference is the leading Australasian meeting for adult and paediatric infectious disease and clinical microbiology specialists. For more information visit the [ASID website.](https://www.asid.net.au/meetings/2015-asm-2)

**OTHER ‘HOT TOPICS’ FROM ASID2015**

**Vaccine for rheumatic fever on the horizon**

A new vaccine to combat the debilitating disease caused by rheumatic fever may soon become a reality, preventing hundreds of thousands of deaths from heart disease around the world each year.

**Measles booster recommended for New Zealand teens**

A new analysis of recent outbreaks in Auckland highlights the relatively low levels of immunity to measles infection in adolescents, leading experts to recommend an adolescent catch-up immunization program to contain further outbreaks.

**New study shows pneumococcal vaccine success in New Zealand children**: **Vaccine schedule almost eliminates common disease types in under-fives.**

Infectious disease experts are heralding New Zealand's pneumococcal vaccination schedule an unequivocal success as new studies show that certain strains of the disease have almost been eliminated   in children under five and the number of hospitalisations has plummeted as a result.

**Ebola:  Reports from the field**

Associate Professor Dale Fisher went to Liberia to join the fight against Ebola not once, but twice.  Hear this eminent expert talk about his experiences in the field, and listen to reports on the outbreak, including the virus behind the disease, and lessons learnt from the Australian-run Ebola centre.

**What’s in our food?**

Experts gather in Auckland to discuss how to best to manage food borne disease risks and present findings from recent outbreaks including *Yersinia* and *Salmonella*. Should the use of raw eggs in restaurant mayonnaise be banned?

**Leprosy in New Zealand**

It may be rare, but it’s still here, and doctors need to know how to diagnose and treat it.

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