

H. PYLORI KEY MESSAGES (1 module, 30 minutes)

1. What is H. pylori?

Suggested questions: Have you heard of H. pylori? What do you know about H. pylori?

- **H. pylori is a bacteria that can infect the human stomach.**
- The bacteria lives in the lining of the stomach, and it produces chemicals that causes inflammation of the stomach lining.
- **It is the most common infection in the world. As many as half the world's population have it.** A study found that the H. pylori infection rate was 70.1% in a clinic in NYC (Lower Manhattan Hospital, Chinatown)

2. What are the symptoms of H. pylori?

Many people with H. pylori infection do not have any signs or symptoms. When symptoms happen, they may include:

- Nausea and/or vomiting
- An ache or burning pain in your abdomen
- Abdominal pain that's worse when your stomach is empty
- Loss of appetite
- Frequent burping
- Bloating
- Weight loss for no clear reason

It is necessary to visit a doctor if you suspect you have *H. pylori*.

3 What complications are H. pylori associated with?

- Complications associated with H. pylori infection are:
 - Inflammation of the stomach lining (gastritis)
 - Ulcers
 - Stomach cancer

4. Stomach cancer key facts

Suggested questions: What do you know about stomach cancer?

- Stomach cancer is the **5th most common cancer in the world**, with 1 million new cases each year.
- In the US: Stomach cancer is more prevalent among immigrants than white Caucasians. **Chinese Americans are more likely to develop stomach cancer than other racial/ethnic groups.**
- Early detection of stomach cancer is associated with higher survival.

- **The top risk factor for stomach cancer is H. pylori infection**, so it is very important that you treat the H. pylori infection.

5. How is H. pylori spread?

Suggested questions: How do you think H. pylori is spread?

- H. pylori is **mostly transmitted during childhood**, especially if living in developing countries or crowded conditions.
- The exact way that H. pylori spreads is **still unknown**. However most scientists and doctors think that it is spread through:
 - **Saliva**
 - **Vomit**
 - **Food or water contaminated with feces**

The following transmission methods have NOT been proven but we urge you to take all necessary precautions and do the following until you have finished your medicine:

- Use your own utensils
- Improve hygiene practices (wash your hands properly after going to the bathroom, before preparing food and eating, etc)

6. How is H. pylori treated?

- There is no one single drug that can treat H. pylori
- Most treatment include **3 different drugs: 2 antibiotics, and 1 acid-reducer, taken for 14 days**
- The treatment **doesn't always work: successful 70-80% of the time**. Some scientists think that it is because H. pylori is becoming more resistant to antibiotics.

NOTE: Ask participant what kind of medicine h/she has. It is usually clarithromycin (Biaxin), amoxicillin (Amoxil, Moxatag, DisperMox) or metronidazole (Flagyl), **and** a PPI (proton pump inhibitor) – most probably omeprazole (Prilosec) or lansoprazole (Prevacid).

Record in the Encounter Report what kind of medicine h/she has, and the following information:

- *Length of prescription (ie 10 days or 14 days)*
- *How medicines are packaged (ie separate bottles, blister packs)*
- *What language instructions are in, if any*

If the patient has not filled his/her prescription, probe and explore barriers.

7. What are the side effects of taking the medicines?

Suggested questions: Did the doctor or pharmacist tell you about any of the side effects you may have?

Say that different people experience side effects differently. Some do not have any side effects. Express empathy for the potential seriousness of the side effects. Prepare the participant for how bad they can get.

- Side effects:
 - Diarrhea or constipation
 - Nausea/vomiting
 - Metal taste in mouth
 - Dry mouth, increased thirst
 - Abdominal pain/cramps/gas
 - Headache
 - Fatigue
- *If prescribed metronidazole (Flagyl):* Flagyl may cause sun sensitivity, headache, skin flushing and sweating when combined with alcohol
- Most side effects get better after one week.

8. What can help with the side effects?

- **Take medicines with food**
- **Avoid large fatty meals**
- **Avoid pickled and spicy foods**
- **If you have unpleasant taste in your mouth, suck on candy or drink ginger tea**
- Drink lots of water
- Avoid alcohol
- Avoid caffeine and carbonated drinks

9. What can affect the success of your treatment?

- **Not taking the medicines correctly**
- **Not finishing the medicines**
- **Smoking** during the treatment period – smoking affects the efficacy of the antibiotics. Smokers who stop smoking during the treatment have the same results as non-smokers.
- Being resistant to the antibiotics

10. What happens if you do not finish the course of medicine?

- The medicine may not work

- There is risk of antibiotic resistance. When you do not finish the medicine, bacteria may still be in your system. This creates an ideal environment for the stronger bacteria to change and become resistant to antibiotics. The new, antibiotic-resistant bacteria survive and multiply. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria are more difficult to kill and you may need a stronger dose of antibiotics.
You may be asked to do triple therapy again (with another antibiotic)
- You may be asked to do quadruple therapy (with 4 medicines)

11. The importance of medication adherence

- Stress that it is extremely important to complete the treatment
- If H.pylori is not eradicated you are at higher risk of developing stomach cancer

Ask patients about when they are supposed to take their medication. Ask how they intend to remember to take their medicine. Listen to their plan. If they seem to be at a loss or say that they always have difficulty remembering to take their medicine, share the following strategies with them:

- Time the medicine with breakfast and dinner
- Set an alarm
- Share your schedule with a family member

Say that you will be following up with them to provide reminders about taking the medicine. Ask for best times/schedule and frequency of the follow-ups.