

## **Antibiotics Less Effective in Hong Kong**

Antibiotics are less effective in Hong Kong than anywhere in the world because doctors prescribe them too often, a report said on Tuesday.

Up to 90 per cent of common bacteria are resistant to antibiotics compared with between 30 and 40 per cent in the United States and Canada, according to a microbiologists' report for the Hospital Authority.

More than 12 per cent of patients in Hong Kong showed resistance to a new antibiotic compared with less than 1 per cent in North America, the report, quoted in the daily South China Morning Post, said.

The findings were described as worrying by doctors who warned that over-prescription of antibiotics leaves the territory exposed to the risk of antibiotic-resistant "superbugs".

The superbug, staphylococcus aureus, broke through last-line antibiotics and killed a woman in 1998 in Hong Kong and four more elderly people last year.

Bacteria samples were taken from 180 patients in public hospitals for the new survey, the Post reported. It found the resistance of the bacteria, streptococcus pneumoniae, to penicillin was 60 per cent and to erythromycin, another popular antibiotic, 80 per cent.

Hong Kong University microbiologist Dr Ho Pak-leung said immediate action is needed to launch a campaign to reduce the use of antibiotics.

A pilot program in one Hong Kong hospital has already reduced the use of one antibiotic by 40 to 50 per cent in the past two years but doctors at clinics still regularly prescribe antibiotics for even minor ailments.