



## Monthly antibiotic shots work best to prevent rheumatic fever from harming the heart

### Evidence in numbers



11 studies with 3,951 participants  
under 15 years old

5 countries – USA, UK, Canada,  
India, Uganda

An equal number of boys and girls.

### Authors' Conclusions

- Antibiotics, pills or injections (shots) can help prevent rheumatic fever from returning.
- Shots work better than pills.
- People with mild heart damage benefit more than those with severe damage.
- Side effects of antibiotics are usually mild, such as rashes or redness.
- More research is needed, especially for pregnant women and people with serious heart problems.

Bray JJH, Thompson S, Seidler S, Ali SA, Yiu J, Salehi M, Ahmad M, Pelone F, Gashau H, Shokraneh F, Ahmed N, Cassandra M, Marijon E, Celermajer DS, Providencia R. Long-term antibiotic prophylaxis for prevention of rheumatic fever recurrence and progression to rheumatic heart disease. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2024, Issue 9. Art. No.: CD015779. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD015779. Accessed 29 August 2025.

### Results



#### Stop Rheumatic Fever Coming Back

- Monthly antibiotics cut risk of RF by over half
- **1 in 33** helped by monthly treatment
- Heart problems at the start don't change your risk



#### Protect the Heart

- Monthly shots slow heart damage by 91%
- **1 in 14** improve with treatment



#### Shots vs Pills

- Shots are taken more regularly than pills
- Shots may protect better (**0.1% vs 1.0% recurrence**)
- Both can cause mild skin or allergic reactions



#### Key Message

- Monthly antibiotics protect young hearts
- Shots work best for staying on treatment

### About Cochrane South Africa

This Plain Language Summary was produced by Cochrane South Africa, at the South African Medical Research Council, which seeks to improve public health outcomes through producing, promoting, and translating high-quality evidence-based research.

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