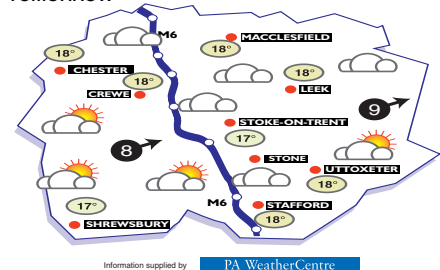


Info Desk

Weather

TOMORROW



TONIGHT: There will be plenty of cloud with a risk of patchy light rain or drizzle during the first part of the night. It will become drier again by morning, but cloud will linger. There will be a light westerly wind. Min temp 9-12°C (48-54°F).

TOMORROW: Plenty of cloud around throughout the day. However, it will stay mainly dry and a few brighter periods are expected to develop. It will feel rather chilly. A light west to south-westerly wind. Max temp 14-17°C (57-63°F).

Air Pollution: Rural: 3; Towns and Cities: 3; Roadside: 3. Low (1-3), Moderate (4-6), High (7-9), Very High (10).

Hours of Darkness: 7.52pm to 6.16am and 7.49pm to 6.18am. Data supplied by the Science and Engineering Research Council.

Chemists

ALSAGER: Lloyds, Lawton Road, 11am-noon.

AUDLEY: Co-op, Church Street, 11.45am-12.45pm.

BURSLEM: Co-op, Chell Heath Road, noon-1pm.

CHESTERTON: Hulme & Stanier, London Road, 2.30-3pm.

CONGLETON: Boots, Bridge Street, noon-1pm.

CREWE: Williams, Nantwich Road, 11am-3pm.

ENDON: McMullen, Station Road, 10-11am.

GOLDENHILL: Goldenhill Pharmacy, Anne Street, 11am-noon.

LEEK: Lloyds, Fountain Street, noon-1pm.

MACCLESFIELD: Tesco Instore, Hibel Road, 10am-4pm.

NANTWICH: Williams, High Street, 6-7pm.

SANDBACH: Co-op, Asfields Primary Care centre, Middlewich Road, 6-7pm.

SHELTON: Lloyds, Stoke Road, 10am-10pm.

STAFFORD: Wildwood Pharmacy, Kwik Save, Wildwood, 10am-4pm.

STONE: Boots, High Street, noon-1pm.

UTTOXETER: Boots, High Street, noon-1pm.



Helpline

Child Support Agency: National Association for Child Support Action, North Staffs and South Cheshire branch. Telephone helpline for CSA advice: 01782 646646. Press and Publicist Officer Neale Sheldon, 4 The Cordway, Newcastle, Staffs, ST5 8NN. Tel: 01782 629200.

Staffordshire Alcohol Advisory Service (SAAS): Offers confidential advice and information to anyone affected by their own or someone else's drinking. Office hours: Monday to Thursday 9.30am to 4.30pm; Friday 9.30pm to 4pm. For Leek, Cheadle and Biddulph phone the Hanley number. Tel: Hanley 01782 271096; Stafford 01785 224771; Burton 01283 511080.

Al-Anon Family Groups: Are a fellowship of relatives and friends of alcoholics who share their experience, strength and hope in order to solve their common problems. Tel: (24 hour service) 0207 4030888.

Mediation Advisory Services for Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent: Tel: 0845 6020301.

National Lottery

Last night's daily lotto numbers: 01, 03, 04, 06, 08, 10, 18

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HERE'S LOOKIN' AT YOU: a ceramics festival designed to boost the image of Stoke-on-Trent's pottery industry around the world has been launched. The first annual Stoke-on-Trent Ceramics Festival runs until Sunday. Organisers hope the event will raise millions of pounds for Stoke-on-Trent in years to come. The £10,000 festival will feature the best of North Staffordshire's young designers and leading studio potters from around the country in several locations. Full details of the festival can be found at www.visitstoke.co.uk or by calling 01782 236000. Pictured is Keith Marsh at Trentham Gardens with a John Wayne bust

Picture: Clare Lewis

Probe launched after bug cases soar six fold

Infection ravages elderly care wards

BY DAVE BLACKHURST
HEALTH REPORTER

THE number of patients being struck down with a potentially fatal infection on elderly care hospital wards has soared in the past five years.

New figures show the victims of Clostridium Difficile (C Dif) rose 19 per cent to 145 in the year to March on the seven wards at the City General centre and Bucknall Hospital.

But in 2000 there were just 25 cases of the illness, which happens when antibiotics destroy protective bacteria in the gut allowing the bug through.

It then creates ulcerations on the bowel wall lining resulting in sometimes violent bouts of diarrhoea and vomiting.

Now Combined Healthcare Trust which runs the wards has launched the clinical audit projects to explore why the rate of infection has increased six fold in five years.

The condition can prove the final straw for frail elderly people already weakened by other illnesses — but despite the rise, the death rate in North Staffordshire has remained constant.

Statistics supplied by the coroner's office of North Staffordshire, show C Dif was linked to the deaths of 17 people in both 2003 and 2004 with 10 reported in the first half of this year.

Doctors at the CHT have now made changes in the way they prescribe antibiotics to make sure the weakest patients can be spared the more powerful of the range of drugs.

The trust's annual infection control report shows ward 86 at the City General was the worst-hit with 32 casualties - followed by 26 victims on ward 84 and 23 in ward 85.

The four wards at Bucknall saw 44 cases in the 12 months but there were only a total of 20 in North Staffordshire's other elderly care centres at Bradwell, Westcliffe in Chell, the Haywood in Burslem, Longton, Leek and Cheadle.

This year's rise is below the national average of 23 per cent. There is also a suspicion that the figures could have been artificially inflated because the bug shows similar symptoms to another illness called norovirus which is less serious.

Experts also say that the trend is linked with an increased number of patients with serious under-

lying illness who need antibiotics.

Coroner Ian Smith said: "This is only a very occasional cause of death being involved in less than 0.5 per cent of cases reported to me. It occurs among older people suffering from an infection which needs antibiotics to cure."

"People dying from it normally have serious medical problems and this may be the final assault pushing them over the edge."

"Nobody wants to go back to the days before antibiotics but all drugs have unwanted side effects and antibiotics are no different."

The annual report said cases of the superbug MRSA within the hospitals was 135 - similar to each of the last five years.

dave.blackhurst@
thesentinel.co.uk

100 new Phones 4u stores planned

From Page 1

The investment at Phones 4u comes as rival The Link announced a 28 per cent fall in sales over the 16 weeks to August.

The proposed development comes after a year in which senior figures at the company said the business had increased market

share, driven by the success of its customer excellence programme.

Mr Whiting said the customer excellence programme was at the heart of the company's surging performance.

The company has invested £10 million in a plan to send all 4,000 workers on a week-long training course.

Mr Whiting added: "I know

there has been criticism in the past about the way the business has treated its people but we have worked to turn the organisation around, which is now starting to pay dividends. We have got people who 18 months ago left the company because they were not happy who are knocking at the door again."

John Caudwell, Caudwell

Group chairman and group chief executive, said: "I am proud of the customer excellence improvements, I am proud of the growing positive reputation of Phones 4u but, more than anything, I am proud of the people who have made Phones 4u the success it is today."

david.elks@thesentinel.co.uk

SENTINEL NEWSDESK: CALL 01782 602545