

β -lactam antibiotics (beta-lactam antibiotics) are a class of broad-spectrum antibiotics, consisting of all antibiotic agents that contain a beta-lactam ring in their molecular structures. This includes penicillin derivatives (penams), cephalosporins (cephems), monobactams, and carbapenems.

Most β -lactam antibiotics work by inhibiting cell wall biosynthesis in the bacterial organism and are the most widely used group of antibiotics. Until 2003, when measured by sales, more than half of all commercially available antibiotics in use were β -lactam compounds.

Bacteria often develop resistance to β -lactam antibiotics by synthesizing a β -lactamase, an enzyme that attacks the β -lactam ring. To overcome this resistance, β -lactam antibiotics are often given with β -lactamase inhibitors such as clavulanic acid.

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