

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Strep Throat

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What causes Strep Throat?

Strep throat is an infection of the throat and tonsils caused by group A streptococci bacteria. This type of bacteria may also cause skin infections, ear infections, scarlet fever, pneumonia, toxic shock syndrome and other diseases.

Who gets strep throat?

It is most common among school age children but anyone can get a strep throat infection.

How is strep throat spread?

Strep throat is highly contagious. It can spread through airborne droplets when someone with the infection coughs or sneezes. You can also pick up the bacteria from a doorknob or other surface and transfer them to your nose or mouth. Kitchen utensils and bathroom objects are other common sources of infection transmission.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually occur two to five days after exposure.

When and for how long is a person able to spread strep throat?

When treated with penicillin or other prescription antibiotics, strep throat is usually not spread after 24 hours. If untreated, strep may be spread to others for weeks to months, even after symptoms have stopped.

What's the Difference Between Strep Throat and a Sore Throat? (Symptoms)

Not all sore throats are strep throats. Most episodes of sore throat - which can be accompanied by a runny nose, cough, hoarseness, and red eyes - are caused by viruses. Sore throats usually clear up on their own without requiring medical treatment.

If your child has strep throat, he or she will start to develop other symptoms within about 3 days. Those symptoms can include:

- red and white patches in the throat
- difficulty swallowing
- tender or swollen glands (lymph nodes) in the neck
- red and enlarged tonsils
- headache
- lower stomach pain
- fever
- general discomfort, uneasiness, or ill feeling
- loss of appetite and nausea
- rash

How is strep throat diagnosed?

Doctors usually diagnose the cause of a sore throat on the basis of a physical exam and lab tests. During the exam, your doctor looks for signs and symptoms of strep throat, such as fever and enlarged lymph nodes, and will probably use a tongue depressor to get a good look at the throat and tonsils. your doctor is likely do a throat culture or a rapid antigen test to check for strep throat.

How is strep throat treated?

Treatment is important to prevent rare but serious complications such as rheumatic fever and kidney disease, which may be life threatening. Penicillin is the treatment of choice; however other prescription antibiotics are available. Medication should be taken for as long as directed, usually 10 days.

Can I go to school or work with strep throat?

Children with strep throat should not return to school or child care facilities until they have completed 24 hours of antibiotic treatment and have had no fever for 24 hours. Infected foodhandlers should be excluded from work until 24 hours after starting treatment.

Can strep throat be prevented?

Strep throat can be prevented by following these simple tips:

- Cover the mouth when coughing or sneezing
- Wash hands after wiping or blowing nose, coughing, and sneezing
- Wash hands before preparing food
- See your doctor if you or your child have symptoms of strep throat

Where can I get more information?

- Your doctor, nurse or clinic
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/>
- The Burlington County Department of Health at (609) 265-5548

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