

## FACT SHEET

### Strep Throat

Strep throat is a type of bacterial illness that causes an infection in the throat and tonsils. The bacterium can cause a wide range of infections. Many people can carry Group A *Streptococcus* (GAS) in the throat or on their skin and have no symptoms of illness. Most GAS infections are relatively mild illnesses such as "strep throat," or impetigo (a skin infection). Occasionally these bacteria can cause severe and even life-threatening diseases.  
<http://www.cdc.gov/groupastrep/about/faqs.html>

- Cause:** Group A *Streptococcus* bacteria is the highly contagious bacteria that causes strep throat.
- Symptoms:** It is characterized by a red, sore throat, often with white patches on the tonsils; swollen lymph glands in the neck, fever, rash and headache may also occur. Nausea, vomiting, and abdominal pain are more common in children. Call your physician if you or your child has a sore throat without a cold or runny nose; a sore throat and tender, swollen lymph glands; a sore throat lasting longer than two days, a fever higher than 103 F in older children or any fever lasting longer than two days; rash, severe headache; joint pain or problems breathing or difficulty swallowing. It is possible to have many of these signs and symptoms but not have strep throat. The cause of these signs and symptoms could be a virus so your physician may test specifically for strep throat.
- Spread:** Streptococcal bacteria are spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes directly on someone else. Children may also pick up the bacteria from a toy, doorknob or other surface and transfer them to their noses or mouths. Kitchen utensils and bathroom objects are other common sources of transmission.
- Incubation:** Usually 1-3 days
- Contagious Period:** A person who has strep throat is contagious until 24 hours after taking an antibiotic
- Precautions:** Children between ages 5 and 15 are most commonly at risk. The infection often circulates in late fall, winter and early spring. Strep throat peaks in the fall and spring, while viruses peak in the winter. Strep bacteria flourish when groups of people are in close contact. That is why it quickly spreads among family members, in schools and in child-care settings.
- Diagnosis:** Your physician can perform a test called a "rapid strep" test by swabbing the back of the throat and tonsils. Within 10 minutes you will know if the test is positive or negative. If it comes back positive the diagnosis is

confirmed. If the test comes back negative it can be sent in for culture to confirm the presence of the bacteria. Cultures take about 48 hours but a physician who thinks you have strep throat can prescribe antibiotics rather than waiting for the culture result.

**Treatment:** Strep throat is best treated by antibiotics since the disease can lead to serious complications if left untreated. Antibiotics are a quick, effective treatment. If untreated, strep throat can sometimes cause complications like tonsillitis, sinusitis, ear infections, scarlet fever (strep throat with a rash) or rheumatic fever.

**Prevention:** Good hand washing, especially after coughing and sneezing and before preparing foods or eating reduces the spread of strep throat and many other illnesses. People with sore throats and fever should be seen by a physician who can test for strep throat or other illnesses. Persons with strep throat need to stay home from work, school, or day care until 24 hours after taking an antibiotic.