



Streptococcal Pharyngitis ("Strep Throat") Fact Sheet

What Is "Strep Throat"

Strep throat is a type of sore throat that can occur when a person is infected by Group A Streptococcus (GAS) bacteria. It is characterized by a red, sore throat, often with white patches on the tonsils; swollen lymph glands in the neck, fever and headache may also occur. Nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain are more common in children.

Although anyone can get Strep throat, it is unusual in children under 3 years of age. Strep throat is most often seen in children aged 6-12. After 12 years of age, fewer cases are seen.

Unfortunately, Strep throat infections can occur in one person more than once because there are many different types of streptococcal bacteria that causes this infection.

When should a person seek medical attention for a "sore" throat?

Persons who have a sore throat for longer than a week, have a fever higher than 100.4°, difficulty swallowing or breathing, pus on the back of the throat, blood in saliva or phlegm, rash, or hoarseness lasting more than 2 weeks should seek medical attention. Anyone who develops Strep throat like symptoms while living in the same household with persons known to have Strep

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throat should also consult a doctor. Symptoms of Strep throat usually appear 2-4 days after exposure to “Strep throat” bacteria.

What is the difference between a “sore” throat and Strep throat?

Sore throats can be caused by many different viruses and bacteria, so it is difficult for even doctors to know the cause without laboratory testing. A simple throat swab and laboratory test done by a healthcare professional can distinguish Strep throat from a “sore” throat. This is an important step. Most “sore” throats don’t respond to antibiotics and go away in a few days without treatment. Strep throat does respond to antibiotics and if left undiagnosed and untreated can lead to rare but serious complications such as rheumatic fever.

What is the treatment for Strep throat?

Because bacteria cause Strep throat, it is easily treated with antibiotics. It is VERY important for all persons diagnosed with Strep throat to take the entire prescribed antibiotic. This will kill the Strep bacteria and prevent the small risk of complications seen with Strep throat infections.

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How are GAS bacteria spread?

Streptococcal bacteria are spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes directly on someone else. Casual contact, such as sitting next to infected persons, rarely leads to infection.

How long is a person able to spread Strep GAS bacteria?

An untreated person can spread bacteria for as long as 2-3 weeks. With adequate antibiotic therapy, however, the treated person is usually only contagious for 24 to 48 hours. For this reason, persons diagnosed with “Strep throat” should rest quietly at home from work, school or childcare centers until the antibiotic has been taken for at least 24 hours.

*For further information, contact the
Oklahoma City-County Health Department
(405) 425-4437*

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