



Group A Streptococcus Fact Sheet

What is a Group A Streptococcal Infection?

It is any infection caused by a bacteria of a particular type called Group A Streptococcus bacteria (GAS). These bacteria are commonly found in the throat and on the skin. About 20% of people carry these bacteria in their throats without getting sick. When it does cause illness, the resulting disease is classified into one of two categories: Invasive or Noninvasive.

What is the difference between “Noninvasive” Strep A infections and “Invasive” Strep A infection?

“Non-invasive” GAS infections include common diseases such as Strep throat, scarlet fever, impetigo, ear infections and pneumonia. These infections are less severe and more contagious than invasive group A Strep infections.

“Invasive” GAS infections are more aggressive or severe and may cause conditions known as streptococcal toxic shock syndrome (STSS), rheumatic fever and necrotizing fasciitis. Invasive infections are caused by particular strains of GAS, known as types M-1 and M-3. These types of bacteria are not common but can move into the body’s tissues (necrotizing fasciitis) or overcome the body’s defense mechanisms and enter the blood (STSS).

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Why does infection with Invasive Group A Strep occur?

Invasive GAS infections occur when the bacteria gets past the person's immune defenses. This is possible when a person has sores or other breaks in the skin that allow the bacteria to invade the tissue. Health conditions that decrease a person's immunity to infection makes GAS associated diseases more likely to occur.

What are the early signs of Invasive group A Strep infections?

Early signs and symptoms may include fever, dizziness, confusion, diffuse red rash, nausea and vomiting and abdominal pain. Early signs of necrotizing fasciitis include fever, severe pain and swelling and redness at the wound site.

Who is at risk of getting Invasive Group A Strep infections?

Invasive GAS infections are rare. Casual contact does not increase the risk of GAS infection, therefore, children in a classroom setting are not considered at risk of getting invasive GAS. Conditions that increase the risk of developing necrotizing fasciitis include cuts, burns, penetrating injuries, surgical procedures, chicken pox, childbirth and blunt trauma.

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How is Group A Strep spread?

GAS is spread by direct contact with secretions from the nose and throat of infected persons. It is also spread by direct contact with infected wound or sores on the skin.

What will prevent the spread of Group A Strep?

Good hand washing, particularly after coughing and sneezing, is important in preventing the spread of GAS infection. It is important to cover the nose and mouth when coughing and sneezing. In addition, washing, treating, and covering infected wounds and sores prevent the spread of bacteria.

Are Invasive Group A Strep infections treatable?

GAS infections can be treated with many different antibiotics. Since invasive infections can be potentially life threatening, early treatment will reduce the risk of serious illness.

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

revised 04/2013

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