

STREP THROAT / SCARLET FEVER

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What is Strep Throat? Scarlet Fever?

Strep throat is a sore throat caused by streptococcal bacteria. It is important to diagnose and treat strep throat with an antibiotic because significant problems may result if it is left untreated.

Strep throat can occur at any age, but is most common in school-age children. It can occur year round, but peaks in late winter and early spring.

Scarlet fever is also caused by streptococcal bacteria and is characterized by a skin rash, usually in children under 18 years of age. A fine red rash appears most often on the neck, chest, abdomen, under arms, elbows, groin, and on the inner surfaces of the thighs. The rash feels like sandpaper. In addition to the rash, a person with scarlet fever may have the same symptoms as strep throat.

How is it spread?

This germ is carried in the mouth and nasal fluids, so it can be spread in the air by coughing or sneezing, and by direct contact such as kissing or sharing eating utensils. The incubation period is usually 1-3 days. Someone can be contagious for 10-21 days or longer if the disease is untreated. Casual contact rarely leads to infection.

How is it treated?

A throat culture or strep test is needed to accurately diagnose a strep throat. Strep throat and scarlet fever are treated with antibiotics. It is very important to complete antibiotic therapy as recommended. Untreated or inadequately treated streptococcal infections can lead to serious complications such as kidney disease, rheumatic fever, or throat abscesses. Adequate hydration and rest are also important.

How can we prevent Strep Throat?

- Wash hands frequently and thoroughly.
- Cough or sneeze into tissue. Dispose of tissue properly. Wash hands after using a tissue for a cough or sneeze.
- Exclude persons known to have a strep infection from school until 24 hours after beginning antibiotics.

SYMPTOMS OF STREP THROAT

- sudden onset of fever
- sore throat with red-dened, white or yellow tonsil area
- painful swallowing
- swollen and tender lymph nodes on neck
- whitish coating on tongue
- ear pain
- skin rash in the presence of the above symptoms may indicate scarlet fever

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