

Strep Throat (Streptococcal Sore Throat)

WHAT IS IT? Strep (Streptococcal) Throat is caused by the streptococci bacterium. Symptoms of strep throat include a sudden onset of fever, sore throat, enlarged lymph nodes and sometimes a headache, stomach ache, nausea or vomiting. The throat can appear red and there may be white pus on the tonsils. Not all sore throats are caused by streptococci bacteria, so only persons testing positive for strep infections should be treated with antibiotics. Scarlet fever is the combination of strep throat and a skin rash caused by the bacteria. The rash usually appears on the neck, chest, groin and underarm area. A rare complication of strep throat is rheumatic fever. Rheumatic fever is an inflammatory disease that can involve the heart, joints, skin and brain. The risk of rheumatic fever is reduced by prompt treatment with appropriate antibiotics.

HOW IS IT SPREAD? Strep throat is usually transmitted through droplets and infectious discharges.

WHEN IS IT CONTAGIOUS? Contagion occurs a day or two before obvious symptoms, and if untreated 4-5 days after symptoms. If treated with antibiotics, a case is contagious for less than 24 hours.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED AND TREATED? Symptomatic children should be referred for diagnosis by a rapid strep test and culture. Typically, antibiotics are prescribed to treat strep throat. Treatment instructions must be followed closely to prevent rheumatic fever.

SHOULD THE CHILD STAY HOME? A student with a positive test should be excluded from school until 24 hours after beginning treatment and fever free. A student who is ill enough to warrant testing should be excluded from school until they are tested or cleared by a health care provider.

HOW CAN WE LIMIT THE SPREAD?

- Frequent hand washing, especially after coughing and sneezing, and before preparing foods or eating, will help limit the spread of the disease.
- Only symptomatic family or household contacts of an infected person should be tested for strep throat.
- Replace the toothbrush after contagion has disappeared.