

# Health Office Fact Sheet



## Strep Throat

### What is Strep Throat?

Group A streptococcal (GAS) infections are caused by *Streptococcus pyogenes*, a bacterium that is commonly found on the skin or in the upper respiratory tract (nose and throat). The term group A refers to the presence of an antigen found on the surface of the bacterium, which helps in its identification.

### Symptoms

Symptoms of strep throat, which is very common among young children and teenagers, include fever, stomach pain, and red, swollen tonsils.

### Treatment

Strep throat usually requires treatment with antibiotics.

### How Strep Throat Spreads

Anybody can get strep throat, but it's most common in school-age children and teenagers. These infections occur most often during the school year when big groups of children and teenagers are in close quarters. The bacteria that cause strep throat (group A streptococcus) tend to hang out in the nose and throat, so normal activities like sneezing, coughing, or shaking hands can easily spread infection from one person to another.

That's why it's so important to teach children the importance of hand washing — good hygiene can lessen their chances of getting contagious diseases like strep throat.

### Strep Throat vs. Sore Throat

Not all sore throats are strep throats. Most episodes of sore throat — which can be accompanied by a runny nose, cough, hoarseness, and red eyes — are caused by viruses and usually clear up on their own without medical treatment.

A child with strep throat will start to develop other symptoms within about 3 days, such as:

- red and white patches in the throat
- difficulty swallowing
- tender or swollen glands (lymph nodes) in the neck
- red and enlarged tonsils
- headache
- lower stomach pain
- fever
- general discomfort, uneasiness, or ill feeling
- loss of appetite and nausea
- rash

### Diagnosis

If your child has a sore throat and other strep throat symptoms, call your doctor. The doctor will likely do a rapid strep test in the office, using a cotton swab to take a sample of the fluids at the back of the throat. The test only takes about 5 minutes.

If it's positive, your child has strep throat. If it's negative, the doctor will send a sample to a lab for a throat culture. The results are usually available within a few days.

### Treatment

In most cases, doctors prescribe about 10 days of antibiotic medication to treat strep throat. Within about 24 hours after starting on antibiotics, your child will probably no longer have a fever and won't be contagious. By the second or third day after taking antibiotics, the other symptoms should start to go away, too. With the proper medical care — along with plenty of rest and fluids — a child should be back to school and play within a few days.