



Education

Strep Throat

What is strep throat?

Strep throat is an infection of the throat caused by bacteria called Streptococci. There are different types of streptococci. The type that causes serious sore throats and needs to be treated with antibiotics is called group A strep.

How does it occur?

Strep infections are very contagious. They are usually passed directly from person to person. Strep throat is common in school-age children. Children under 2 years old and adults not exposed to children are much less likely to get strep throat. It is most common from November through April, but it can happen any time of year.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of a strep infection may include:

- sore, red throat
- painful swallowing
- fever
- chills
- headaches
- muscle aches and pains
- tired feeling
- swollen, tender lymph nodes (glands) in the neck
- loss of appetite.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will ask about your symptoms and examine your throat. Usually you will have a strep test. Your provider will rub a cotton swab against a tonsil in the back of your throat to get a sample of bacteria. The sample will be tested in the lab. The results will be available in an hour or less if the rapid antibody test is done, or in 1 to 2 days if the overnight culture test is used.

How is it treated?

If your health care provider suspects you have strep, he or she may prescribe an antibiotic before you have all the results from the lab tests. This medicine may be taken as pills or given as a shot. It is very important to take all of the prescribed medicine, even after the symptoms have gone away, to prevent the infection from coming back. Strep needs to be treated so you can prevent serious problems it might cause, such as heart disease.

How long will the effects last?

The symptoms of strep throat may go away as soon as 24 hours after you start treatment. The symptoms rarely last longer than 5 days.

Not getting treatment for strep throat or not taking all the medicine prescribed can lead to rheumatic fever. Rheumatic fever can damage the heart valves and affect your joints and brain.

How can I take care of myself?

Follow the full treatment prescribed by your health care provider.

For a sore throat:

- Make sure you have enough fluids. Drink clear soup, cold drinks, and other clear, nutritious liquids. If eating hurts your throat, don't force yourself to eat solid food. When you are able to eat more foods, choose healthy food to give you strength and to help fight the infection.
- Do not smoke. Do not breathe second-hand smoke.
- Gargle with salt water.
- Suck on lozenges or hard candy.
- Don't talk a lot. Rest your voice.
- Use a humidifier or vaporizer to add moisture to the air.
- Put warm compresses on your neck.

If you have a fever, rest and limit your activities until the fever is gone. Ask your health care provider if you can take aspirin, acetaminophen, or ibuprofen to reduce your fever and to relieve pain. Anyone under age 21 with a fever should not take aspirin because it increases the risk of Reye's syndrome.

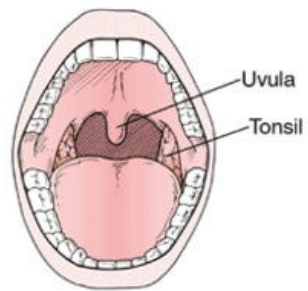
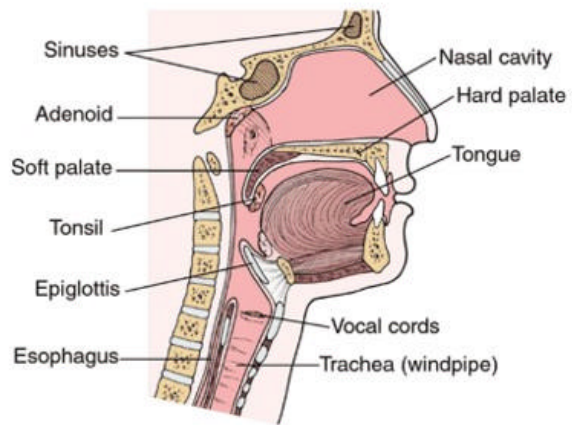
How can I help prevent spreading strep throat?

The following suggestions may help you prevent spread of your strep infection to others.

- Avoid close contact with other people until you have been taking the antibiotic for 24 to 48 hours so they will not be exposed to the strep bacteria.
- Use tissues when you cough and dispose of them carefully.
- Hand washing is the best method of prevention. Wash your hands before you touch food, dishes, glasses, silverware, napkins, etc.
- Wash your hands after you cough.
- Be careful not to let your nose or mouth touch public telephones or drinking fountains.
- Use paper cups and paper towels in bathrooms instead of shared drinking cups and hand towels.
- Do not share food and eating utensils with others.

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Head and Throat



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