

Strep Throat

What is strep throat? What are the signs of strep throat?

Strep throat is an infection caused by bacteria. It is called "strep" because the bacteria that causes the infection is called **streptococcus**. Symptoms are typically:

- A sore throat without a cold or runny nose
- A sore throat accompanied by tender, swollen lymph glands
- A sore throat that lasts more than 48 hours
- A fever of more than 103 F, or any fever lasting more than 48 hours

Get medical care immediately if you or your child:

- Has problems breathing or difficult swallowing anything, including saliva
- Develops new signs and symptoms in addition to a sore throat, such as a severe headache, chest pain, shortness of breath, a rash or joint pain

How is strep throat treated?

Strep frequently will go away on its own, but antibiotics kill the streptococcus bacteria, which helps strep throat go away a lot faster. Penicillin or high dose amoxicillin is considered standard treatment. Keflex and Duricef work well also. If swallowing is very difficult or if you are extremely sick we may give you an injection with Rocephin.

Antibiotic treatment also prevents a few rare but serious conditions that people with strep throat might get. It is important to take all of the medicine your doctor gives you.

Should all sore throats be treated with antibiotics?

No. Not every sore throat is strep throat. Bacteria only cause about 5% to 10% of sore throats. The rest are caused by viruses or other problems, and antibiotics will not help. We can do a test to make sure it is strep throat.

What test tells if I have strep throat?

We swab your throat and do a rapid strep test which takes about 5 minutes. A *culture* can be sent to our laboratory, but we don't do that because the rapid tests are so good now! It takes 2 days to learn the results of a strep *culture*. If your rapid test is negative and the *culture* is positive, you have a very small amount of strep in your throat- an amount too small to cause a serious illness. If that is the case with you, you are most likely a carrier and not truly ill from a strep infection. If something else is causing your sore throat, these tests do not tell what it is.

Why aren't other tests available to find other causes of sore throat?

Strep throat has in the past caused terrible problems as rheumatic fever and nephritis. These can cause problems with the heart, skin, muscles, joints and kidney. Fortunately we rarely see these complications now, partly due to effective antibiotic treatment and partly due to unknown changes in the strep bacteria (less virulent).

Can other people catch my strep throat?

Yes. You can give the infection to other people until you have been treated with an antibiotic for 1 to 3 days. Children with strep throat should not go back to school or day care until their fever has gone away and they have taken an antibiotic for at least 24 hours.

How long till I feel better?

If you are hallucinating, out of it, have blood in your urine, chest pain or productive cough, difficulty swallowing or breathing, a rash or joint pain, a severe headache **call or come in!**

After 24 hours on medication (or within 12 hours of getting a shot) you should feel remarkably better. If you still have a high fever or your symptoms are unchanged, come in. Usually we just give (another) shot. But once a year we get someone with a pus pocket in the tonsil, peritonsillar abscess (which requires drainage), and every month we get a case of mononucleosis *with* strep.

What can make my sore throat feel better?

Here are some things that might help you feel better:

- Taking ibuprofen (brand names: Advil, Motrin, Nuprin) or acetaminophen (brand name: Tylenol). Children should not take aspirin. Aspirin can cause Reyes syndrome -a serious illness- and in some cases, death when it is used in children under 18 who have the flu.
- Gargling with warm salt water (1/4 teaspoon of salt in 1 cup [8 ounces] of warm water).
- For adults and older children, sucking on throat lozenges, hard candy or pieces of ice.
- Eating soft foods, drinking cool drinks or warm liquids or sucking on Popsicles.
- Get plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.

How can I prevent the spread of this or other infections?

Proper hand washing is the best way to prevent all kinds of infections. That's why it's important to wash your own hands regularly and to show your children how to wash their hands properly.

- Use soap and running water.
- Rub your hands vigorously as you wash them.
- Wash the backs of your hands, your wrists, between your fingers and underneath your fingernails.
- Wash for as long as it takes for you to sing the alphabet song or the happy birthday song.
- Rinse well and leave the water running until you're done washing.
- Give every family member their own towel in each bathroom (at least when sick).

In addition, teach your children to cover their mouths when they cough or sneeze. And if your child does have strep throat, make sure no one else uses his or her drinking glasses and eating utensils. Wash those items carefully in hot, soapy water or in a dishwasher.