

Streptococcus (“Strep” throat) fact sheet

Strep throat is an infection caused by bacteria called Group A Streptococcus (sometimes just called “Strep”) Strep throat can occur at any age, but is most frequent among school-aged children.

Symptoms start 1 to 5 days after exposure and include:

- Fever
- Sore throat
- Tender and swollen neck glands

Sometimes people with Strep can develop a red rash all over the body that feels like sandpaper. When this occurs, the illness is called “**scarlet fever.**”

People can also harbor Strep bacteria in their throats but not feel sick at all (they are called “carriers”).

Strep throat is spread from person to person

Strep bacteria are spread through direct contact with mucus from the nose or throat of infected persons or through the air by sneezing or coughing. Rarely, people catch Strep throat eating contaminated food or milk. People with Strep throat can spread Strep bacteria to others until 24 hours after antibiotic treatment or for 10 to 21 days if untreated.

Strep throat can be diagnosed by a doctor

Throat cultures usually take 24 to 48 hours. There are also rapid tests, which can be used to diagnose strep throat more quickly.

Treatment is important

Strep throat can be treated with antibiotics. Treatment is important to prevent serious complications such as rheumatic fever and kidney disease, which may be life threatening.

Infected children should be excluded from child care/school until 24 hours after starting treatment.

Strep throat can be prevented

Cover the mouth when coughing or sneezing. Wash hands after wiping or blowing nose, coughing, and sneezing. Wash hands before preparing food. See your doctor if you or your child have symptoms of strep throat.