

STREPTOCOCCAL INFECTION

Streptococcal sore throat (strep throat) and a strep throat with a rash (scarlet fever) are common infections in children.

CAUSE *Streptococcus* bacteria (Group A beta-hemolytic strep).

SYMPTOMS

Strep throat Starts suddenly with fever, red sore throat, and swollen glands. Headache may occur. Nausea, abdominal pain, and vomiting may be more common in children.

Scarlet fever A very fine red rash that feels like sandpaper is present. The rash lasts about 2 to 7 days and appears most often on the neck, chest, elbow, and groin, and in the inner thigh and folds of the armpit. The rash fades on pressure and leads to flaking of the skin. The area surrounding the mouth may have a paler appearance.

These illnesses are usually not serious; however, rare problems such as rheumatic fever (which can damage heart valves) and kidney disease may develop if children do not receive proper antibiotic treatment.

SPREAD Spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes tiny droplets into the air and another person breathes them in. Also can be spread by touching the secretions from the nose and mouth of an infected person or by touching hands, tissues, or other items soiled with these secretions and then touching one's eyes, nose, or mouth.

INCUBATION It usually takes 2 to 5 days from the time a person is exposed until symptoms start.

CONTAGIOUS PERIOD Until 24 hours after antibiotic treatment begins.

EXCLUSION Childcare and School: Until 24 hours after antibiotic treatment begins and the child is without fever.

Children without symptoms, regardless of a positive throat culture, do not need to be excluded from childcare or school. Persons who have strep bacteria in their throats and do not have any symptoms (carriers) appear to be at little risk of spreading infection.

Check with your local environmental health department to see if people with skin lesions need to be excluded from food handling.

DIAGNOSIS Recommend parents/guardians call their health care provider. Not all sore throats are strep throat. Strep may be identified in the throat either by using a rapid strep test, which can provide results the same day, or by throat culture.

TREATMENT Oral or injectable antibiotics may be prescribed. Treatment may be dependent on how severe the infection is and will help prevent more serious illness such as rheumatic fever.

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PREVENTION/CONTROL

- Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing and sneezing or cough/sneeze into your sleeve. Dispose of used tissues in the trash.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after contact with secretions from the nose and mouth or handling used tissues. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.** If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces at least daily and when soiled (see Section 2).
- Do not allow sharing of anything that goes into the mouth, such as drinking cups, straws, water bottles, and eating utensils.

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.

