

# Invasive Group A Streptococcal (iGAS) Disease Fact Sheet

## What is Group A Streptococcus?

Group A Streptococcus (Group A Strep or GAS) is a common bacteria that can cause a variety of infections ranging from no illness to severe illness. The most frequent conditions include: sore throat (commonly referred to as strep throat), ear infections, skin infections and scarlet fever.

## How common is Group A Strep bacteria in the general population?

Group A Strep is commonly found in the nose and throat of about 5-30% of children and 1% of adults. It can be carried in the throat or on the skin of healthy people who show no signs or symptoms of illness.

## How is Group A Strep spread?

Group A Strep is spread through direct contact with the nose or mouth secretions of an infected person, for example, through open mouth kissing, mouth-to-mouth resuscitation or through direct contact with infected sores on the skin.

## Can Group A Strep infections be serious?

In **rare cases**, the same strep bacteria can cause a severe form of illness called **invasive GAS (iGAS) disease**. This happens when bacteria get into parts of the body where bacteria are not usually found such as the blood, muscle or the lungs. The most severe forms of iGAS disease can cause very serious illness and may even lead to death.

## How common is iGAS disease?

In Ontario every year, approximately 2-3 people out of every 100,000 have an invasive GAS infection. This is much less than the thousands of people who experience non-invasive infections such as strep throat.

## What are the signs and symptoms of iGAS disease?

A person with this serious form of Group A Strep infection can become very ill within 12 – 24 hours. There can be a history of flu-like symptoms such as fever, pain and muscle aches before signs of infection or rash quickly develop. In other cases there may be severe pain, swelling, redness or swollen lymph nodes associated with a recent cut or injury.

## What precautions can be taken to prevent iGAS disease?

- Use good personal hygiene, especially frequent and thorough hand washing.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or upper sleeve.
- Wounds and cuts should be well cleansed, disinfected and bandaged.
- Report any sudden or unusual signs of infection, sore throat and/or fever to your doctor.

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**Who is most at risk for iGAS disease?**

Few people who come in contact with Group A Strep develop severe invasive disease. Most will have a routine throat or skin infection. Although healthy people can get invasive disease, people with chronic illnesses like cancer, diabetes and kidney failure, and those who use medications such as steroids, are at higher risk. Breaks in the skin, like cuts, surgical wounds or chickenpox may also provide an opportunity for the bacteria to enter the body.

**What is the role of Public Health?**

Public Health investigates reports of communicable diseases including Invasive GAS disease. Our role is to identify and notify close contacts of an infected person, and assess the need for preventive antibiotics. Contacts are advised to self-monitor for signs and symptoms of iGAS infection and/or fever for 30 days.

**Other Questions?**

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | [www.hpepublichealth.ca](http://www.hpepublichealth.ca)

**References**

- Public Health Agency of Canada.; 3252:1-26
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Group A Streptococcal Disease, April 2008.
- Guidelines for the Prevention & Control of Invasive Group A Streptococcal Disease. CCDR 2006

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