



Strep Throat / Scarlet Fever Fact Sheet

What is it?

Strep throat is an infection caused by the *Streptococcus pyogenes* (Strep) bacteria. The infection is more common in children than adults. Scarlet fever starts as strep throat.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of strep infection include a fever, sore throat, headache and stomach ache. There may also be swollen, tender glands in the neck. Scarlet fever starts with a sore throat and then more general symptoms such as fatigue and a red rash on the body. The rash feels like sandpaper and appears mostly on the neck, chest, armpit, elbow, groin, and on the inner surface of the thighs. The rash does not usually involve the face but there is flushing of the cheeks and paleness around the mouth. Some people may get serious complications if not treated with antibiotics.

How is it spread?

The bacteria are found in an infected person's nose and mouth. The bacteria can be spread easily from person to person. They spread in the droplets when talking, coughing or sneezing. If not treated, the bacteria may be spread to other people for up to 3 weeks.

How is it treated?

Treatment of infected persons with antibiotics (usually penicillin) can stop the spread of strep infection. It is difficult to diagnose strep throat just by looking at the throat. The physician has to take a culture (or swab) from the throat to see if the bacteria are present. If treatment is begun shortly after the infection has started, you will feel better soon. After 1 to 2 days of treatment, the disease will not spread to others.

What can I do about it?

You can protect yourself against strep infections by not sharing eating/drinking utensils or kissing people with sore throats. Hand washing is important to prevent spread of infection, especially after wiping your nose and before eating or preparing food. Cough and sneeze into your sleeve or a tissue. Dispose of soiled tissues appropriately. See your health care provider if you have fever and sore throat for more than 24 hours, swollen neck glands and/or a rash. If a child who is infected attends school or daycare, he/she should not return until antibiotic treatment has been taken for at least one full day (24 hours).

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

References

- Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington Health Unit, Strep Throat/Scarlet Fever, May 2010.
- The Canadian Paediatric Society, Strep Throat and Scarlet Fever, October 2008.
- Heymann, D.L. (2008). *Control of Communicable Disease Manual* (19th Ed). Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.

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