



SORE THROAT

What causes a sore throat?

Many things can cause a sore throat. Viruses (like those that cause colds), bacteria, allergies, or breathing polluted air can cause a sore throat.

What is strep throat?

Strep throat is caused by a bacteria called *Streptococcus pyogenes* (Group A Strep). The pain of strep throat often feels much like a sore throat caused by a virus. Strep throat should be diagnosed with a lab test before antibiotics are given. It is important to treat strep throat with antibiotics. If it isn't treated with antibiotics it can sometimes result in rheumatic fever, which can damage the valves of the heart.

What is tonsillitis?

Tonsillitis means swelling of the tonsils (at the back of your mouth on each side of your throat). It can cause a sore throat and other symptoms similar to strep throat. Tonsillitis can be caused by Group A Strep or by a virus.

What tests may be used to find the cause of my sore throat?

Your healthcare provider may do a rapid strep test, a throat culture or both. A rapid strep test gives results quickly--usually within 15 minutes. A throat culture takes about 24 hours, but its results are more accurate.

What is the treatment for a sore throat caused by *Streptococcus pyogenes*?

If your sore throat is caused by *Streptococcus*, your healthcare provider will give you an antibiotic.

What is the treatment for a sore throat caused by a virus?

Antibiotics don't work against viruses. Infections caused by viruses usually just have to run their course. Most symptoms caused by a cold-type virus go away in a week to 10 days. The pain of sore throat can be eased by:

- Taking Tylenol or ibuprofen (DO NOT give aspirin to a child less than 12 years old).
- Gargling with warm salt water (1 tsp. of salt per glass warm water).
- Drinking lots of fluids.

How can sore throats be prevented?

The best prevention is washing hands regularly, avoiding touching eyes or mouth, covering the mouth when coughing and sneezing, and staying home when sick.