

Strep Throat

What is strep throat? What are the signs of strep throat?

Strep throat is an infection caused by bacteria. It is called "strep" because the bacteria that causes the infection is called streptococcus.

Adults with strep throat may have a sore throat, a fever and swollen neck glands. They usually don't have a cough or a runny nose.

Children with strep throat have a sore throat and may have tummy pain or a red rash with small spots. The rash is worse under the arms and in skin creases.

How is strep throat treated?

Your doctor may give you or your child an antibiotic. Antibiotics kill bacteria, which helps strep throat go away a little faster. It can also prevent a few rare but serious conditions that people with strep throat might get. It is important to take all of the medicine your doctor gives you.

Should all sore throats be treated with antibiotics?

No. Not every sore throat is strep throat. Bacteria only cause about 5% to 10% of sore throats. The rest are caused by viruses or other problems, and antibiotics will not help. Your doctor can do a test to make sure it is strep throat.

What tests can tell I have strep throat?

Your doctor may use a test called the rapid strep test. For this test, the doctor uses a long cotton swab to take some material from the back of your throat. The results of this test can be ready in about 15 minutes.

Your doctor may also do a culture of the throat material. A sample of the throat material is sent to a laboratory. This test is called a throat culture. It takes more than 24 hours to learn the results of a strep culture.

The rapid strep test and the culture can tell your doctor if you have strep throat. If something else is causing your sore throat, these tests do not tell what it is.

Can other people catch my strep throat?

Yes. You can give the infection to other people until you have been treated with an antibiotic for 1 to 3 days. Children with strep throat should not go back to school or day care until their fever has gone away and they have taken an antibiotic for at least 24 hours.

What can make my sore throat feel better?

Here are some things that might help you feel better:

- Taking ibuprofen (some brand names: Advil, Motrin) or acetaminophen (one brand name: Tylenol). Children should not take aspirin. Aspirin can cause Reyes syndrome --a serious illness-- and in some cases, death when it is used in children under 18 who have the flu.
- Gargling with warm salt water (1/4 teaspoon of salt in 1 cup [8 ounces] of warm water).
- For adults and older children, sucking on throat lozenges, hard candy or pieces of ice.
- Eating soft foods, drinking cool drinks or warm liquids or sucking on Popsicles.

Can people get strep throat from their pets?

This could happen, but it is very rare.

Source

[Management of Group A Beta-Hemolytic Streptococcal Pharyngitis](http://www.aafp.org/afp/20010415/1557.html) (*American Family Physician* April 15, 2001, <http://www.aafp.org/afp/20010415/1557.html>)

Reviewed/Updated: 12/05
Created: 9/00

This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

Copyright © 2000-2005 American Academy of Family Physicians
Permission is granted to print and photocopy this material for nonprofit educational uses.
Written permission is required for all other uses, including electronic uses.