

STREP THROAT

(Streptococcal Sore Throat)

BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Infection and inflammation of the pharynx by streptococcal bacteria. Strep throat is contagious. One out of 4 family members usually catches it within 2 to 7 days after exposure. It is most common in children. Infection can be present in individuals with no symptoms, but who can still spread the germs (carrier state).

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Rapid onset of throat pain.
- Throat pain that is worse when swallowing.
- Appetite loss.
- Headache.
- Fever.
- General ill feeling.
- Ear pain when swallowing (sometimes).
- Tender, swollen glands in the neck.
- Bright-red tonsils that may have specks of pus.

CAUSES

Streptococcal bacteria. It is spread by person-to-person contact via drops of saliva or nasal secretions.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Recent strep infection in the household.
- Smoking.
- Fatigue.
- Cold, wet weather.
- Crowded living conditions.
- Day care center or school.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Avoid contact with infected people.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Usually curable in 10 to 12 days with antibiotic treatment. Symptoms are usually better in 2-3 days of treatment.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Ear infection.
- Sinusitis.
- Rheumatic fever.
- Glomerulonephritis.

TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnostic tests may include laboratory studies, such as a throat culture and blood count. A throat culture is the most accurate way to diagnose a strep throat infection.
- For adults or children old enough to gargle, prepare a soothing tea gargle. Double the usual strength of tea, and gargle warm or cold as often as it feels good.
- Use a cool-mist, ultrasonic humidifier to provide moisture. This relieves the dry, tight feeling in the throat. Clean humidifier daily.
- Use warm soaks to relieve pain in swollen glands.
- Isolation from other children for 24 hours after antibiotic therapy begins may be necessary.

MEDICATIONS

- Penicillin or another antibiotic to take orally or by injection. Finish the complete prescription, even if symptoms subside (helps prevent any complications or recurrence).
- Non-prescription pain medicine, such as acetaminophen if needed.

ACTIVITY

After treatment, resume normal activity as symptoms improve. Children may return to school 5 days after beginning antibiotics and fever is normal for 24 hours.

DIET

A liquid diet may be necessary while the throat is sore. Drink as many fluids as possible, including milk shakes, soups, tea, carbonated drinks and iced coffee. Any type and amount of solid food is acceptable as long as it can be swallowed without too much pain.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of a strep throat.
- The following occur during treatment: Temperature is normal for 1 or 2 days, then fever develops. New symptoms appear, such as nausea, vomiting, earache, cough, swollen glands, skin rash, severe headache, nasal drainage or shortness of breath. Joints become red or painful. Dark urine, rash, chest pain or fatigue develops (may occur up to 3 to 4 weeks later).

Adapted from Instructions for Patients, Sixth Edition, H. Winter Griffith, M.D., W.B Saunders Company.