

Strep Throat

FACT SHEET



Washtenaw County
Health Department

What is strep throat?

Strep throat is an infection of the throat. It is caused by group A Streptococcus bacteria. Strep throat may occur in all age groups but it is most common in school aged children and adolescents. If not treated with the right medication, the infection can lead to serious complications such as: rheumatic fever; skin, bloodstream, and ear infections; and pneumonia. It usually takes 2-5 days for symptoms to develop after being exposed to the bacteria. It is important to remember that most sore throats are NOT strep throat and are caused by viruses, like the ones that cause a cold or the flu.

What are the symptoms?

- Severe sore throat
- Fever
- Headache
- Swollen tonsils and glands in the neck
- Pain or difficulty swallowing
- Children may have abdominal pain or a stomach ache

How is it spread?

The bacteria are easily spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes droplets into the air and another person inhales them. Persons can also catch the bacteria if they touch infected secretions and then touch their mouth or nose. After 24 hours of antibiotics, an infected person can no longer spread the bacteria to other people.

How is it treated?

- Call your doctor if you think your child has signs and symptoms of strep throat so he or she can be tested.
- If your child has been diagnosed with strep throat, call the daycare center or school that your child attends so they can observe the other children for symptoms of sore throat and fever.
- If antibiotics are prescribed, have your child take all of the medication as directed, even if he/she is feeling better.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Apply cold or warm compresses to the neck for relief.
- Encourage cool liquids or ice chips.
- Children should be on antibiotic treatment for at least 24 hours before returning to school.

How is it prevented?

- Use tissues to catch coughs and sneezes and throw used tissues in the trash.
- Cough in your elbow or sleeve if no tissues are available.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds after touching any nasal or oral secretions.
- Teach your children to wash their hands with soap and water after they cough or sneeze.
- Always wash your hands with soap and water before preparing food or eating.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.