

Strep Throat

FACTSHEET

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Division of Epidemiology, Disease Surveillance and Investigation

899 N. Capitol Street, NE, Suite 580

Washington, DC 20002

(202) 442-9371

Fax (202) 442-8060

www.doh.dc.gov

What is Strep Throat?

Strep throat is a sore throat caused by bacteria, not a virus. Strep Throat is caused by a Streptococcus Group A bacteria, the same bacteria that causes Scarlet Fever. Strep throat is important to diagnose and treat early because certain kinds of streptococcus infections may cause significant problems if left untreated.

How is Strep Throat Spread?

The illness is spread by close contact with patients, coughing, and sneezing. Casual contact rarely causes transmission. Contaminated food, especially milk and dairy products, can result in outbreaks. Untreated patients are most infectious for the 2-3 weeks after the onset of infection.

How Soon Do Symptoms Appear?

The incubation period, the time between first exposure and the development of symptoms, is usually 2-4 days.

What are the symptoms of Strep Throat?

The symptoms vary quite a bit depending on age. Infants primarily exhibit:

- Thick colorful mucous from the nose
- decreased in appetite
- low-grade fever

Older children (more than 1 year old) may complain of:

- Sore Throat
- Fever
- Trouble Swallowing
- Poor Appetite
- Crankiness
- Swollen Glands
- Tonsillitis

These symptoms mean the child should see a physician as soon as possible. Determining if the illness is caused by a viral or bacteria infection is very important in properly treating the infection.

How is Strep Throat Diagnosed and Treated?

A Strep infection can be diagnosed by a physician. Taking any antibiotics before seeing the physician should be avoided. Even a single dose of antibiotics taken before seeing a physician can interfere with the strep test and the physician's ability to correctly diagnose and properly treat the infection. The physician may take a throat culture by touching a cotton swab to the throat and tonsil area. If a strep infection is detected, usually an antibiotic is prescribed by the physician. The patient should be sure to take the full course of antibiotics as prescribed by the physician. The patient should not stop taking the medication when they start to feel better. If the patient stops taking the medication too early, the infection will not be properly treated and adverse consequences can occur. It is very important that the patient to take all of the antibiotic as prescribed by the physician!

What Can Be Done to Prevent the Spread of Strep Throat?

Frequent hand washing, not sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses, avoiding close contact with people who are already ill with Strep Throat, will help prevent the spread of Strep Throat.

Should a person with Scarlet Fever be excluded from work or school?

People are contagious from the time the sore throat starts until they have been on the appropriate antibiotic for at least 24 hours. They may return to work or school after that time once they are feeling well.

Want more information?

Information about Scarlet Fever and other related health topics can be found at the website www.cdc.gov. The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call (202) 442-9371.

