

Facts about Streptococcal Infections

Streptococcal infections are common in young children. They are caused by streptococcal bacteria.

These bacteria cause:

- strep throat (streptococcal sore throat)
- scarlet fever
- skin infections, such as impetigo (see page 36)
- tonsillitis

How are Streptococcal Infections Spread?

People can get a streptococcal infection, if they touch or kiss the hands or face of someone or if they share dishes or cups with someone who has streptococcal infection.

Streptococcal bacteria are in the saliva of an infected person.

Streptococcal bacteria are spread in infected droplets produced when the infected person coughs, sneezes or talks.

“Strep” Throat

Children with strep throat may have some or all of these signs:

- a very sore throat
- a temperature of 38.5°C or higher
- headache and stomach ache
- swollen tender glands in the neck
- vomiting
- swollen tonsils (tonsillitis)
- pain when swallowing
- sores around the nose
- loss of appetite

Children younger than 3 years with streptococcal infection rarely have a sore throat. They may have a discharge from the nose, bad breath, fever, irritability and loss of appetite.

A child can get strep throat more than once. A doctor can find out if a child has strep throat by taking a swab from the throat and testing it.

Usually the doctor will treat the infection with an antibiotic such as penicillin. The child should feel better in a day or two after starting the antibiotic but should take all the medicine so that the infection does not come back. The antibiotic will also stop streptococcal bacteria from spreading to others.

If strep throat is not treated it can become a more serious disease called rheumatic fever.

Tonsillitis

Streptococcus can cause the tonsils at the back of the throat to become red and swollen. For these cases of tonsillitis a doctor will prescribe antibiotics.

If the tonsillitis has been caused by a virus, the doctor will not prescribe antibiotics. Viral tonsillitis usually lasts for 4 to 10 days.

Scarlet Fever

Scarlet fever is also a streptococcal infection. It is much like strep throat except for two unusual signs:

The child with scarlet fever often has a whitish, furry looking tongue that later becomes strawberry-red in colour. Then a red rash that feels like sandpaper appears all over the body. This rash is caused by a poison that is made by the streptococcal bacteria. After 3-7 days, the rash fades and the skin peels.

A child will usually get scarlet fever only once, because the body becomes immune. Now that antibiotics are used to treat streptococcal infections, scarlet fever is not a common disease. It is found most often in children between the ages of 8 to 10, but can occur at any age. Doctors usually prescribe antibiotics and lots of rest.

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Facts about Streptococcal Infections cont'd



What to Do at Home

- If your child has been in contact with someone with a streptococcal infection, watch your child for signs of infection.
- Wash your hands often when looking after a child with a streptococcal infection.
- Wash your hands before you prepare or eat any food.
- Teach children to wash their hands often.
- Teach children to cover their mouths with a tissue or their sleeve (not their hand), when they cough or sneeze.

Acetaminophen (Tylenol™, Tempra™) or ibuprofen (Advil™, Motrin™) may help reduce a fever and provide some comfort. Always follow the directions on the package about how much and how often to take acetaminophen or ibuprofen.

Never give products containing ASA (acetylsalicylic acid, such as Aspirin™) to anyone under the age of 20 years. Use of ASA products by children can lead to Reye's syndrome, a serious condition affecting the brain and liver.



When to Call Your Doctor or 811

- Talk to your doctor if your child has a sore throat with other signs, such as a temperature of 38.5°C or higher, vomiting or a rash.
- Make sure your child takes all the antibiotic the doctor prescribes so that the streptococcal bacteria are completely killed. Otherwise, the infection may come back.



Children with a streptococcal infection should not return to the child care centre or school until they have completed 24 hours of antibiotic treatment and only when they feel well enough to take part in regular activities.