

Strep Throat (Streptococcal Pharyngitis)

What is strep throat?

Strep throat is an infection of the throat and tonsils. It is most often seen in school-age children. It is spread from one person to another person. Your child may show signs of strep throat from one to three days after being with another person who has strep throat. When your child has strep throat, your child:

- May have a very sore throat
- May not want to swallow and may drool
- May have a fever that is usually higher than 101° F
- May have swollen glands in the neck area
- May feel very tired and cranky
- May have a headache, stomachache or vomit

Most sore throats are not strep throat but are instead caused by a virus. Antibiotics will not treat a viral infection.

What causes it?

Bacteria called “Streptococci pyogenes” causes strep throat. It is sometimes called “strep” for short.

How is it diagnosed?

- The Rapid Strep Test is often used to see if your child has strep throat. This test checks for antibodies that help your child fight strep. Two cotton-tipped swabs are used to gently touch the sides of your child’s throat. One swab is used for the Rapid Strep Test; the other swab may be used for a culture. The Rapid Strep Test is not a culture. Results may be available in 10 to 15 minutes.
- If the Rapid Strep Test does not show that your child has strep throat, a culture may be done. The other cotton-tipped swab will be used for this culture. The results of the culture may not be ready for 48 to 72 hours. Call the doctor or nurse to find out the results.

How is it treated?

- Offer your child plenty of fluids to drink. Do not worry about giving your child solid foods. Fluids are easy to swallow while the throat is very sore.
- Your child will take medicine. An antibiotic medicine will be prescribed for your child. It is important for your child to take all of the medicine. If your child does not take all of the medicine, the infection may return. Even when your child feels well again, you must give your child all the medicine until it is gone.

Treatment (continued)

Keep your child home from school until your child has taken antibiotic medicine for one full day and your child has no fever.

- To keep germs from spreading, it is important for family members to wash hands often. Do not share cups or eating utensils with other family members. If anyone in your family gets a fever, sore throat or swollen glands in the neck, call the doctor or nurse.
- Replace your child's toothbrush with a new toothbrush one to two days after starting the antibiotic medicine.

How long does it last?

It will take from one to three days for your child to feel well again after starting the medicine.

Special Information

There are two major complications of strep throat. These are Rheumatic Fever and Post-Streptococcal Glomerulonephritis:

- Symptoms of Rheumatic Fever include pain and swelling of the joints, fever and rash. Sometimes the valves of the heart may be damaged. These symptoms may be seen from two to 5 weeks after strep throat begins.
- Symptoms of Post-Streptococcal Glomerulonephritis include less urine, dark urine, mild swelling of the hands, feet or around the eyes and tiredness. These symptoms may be seen around 10 days after strep throat begins.

What follow-up care is needed?

Your child's doctor or nurse will tell you if and when your child needs to be seen again.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child:

- Does not seem better after taking antibiotic medicine for 48 hours.
- Has pain and swelling of the joints, fever and rash.
- Has less urine, dark urine and mild swelling of the hands, feet or around the eyes.
- Is under 1 year old and has sunken eyes, no tears when crying and has no damp diaper for 8 hours. These are signs of dehydration.
- Is over 1 year old and has sunken eyes, no tears when crying and no urine for 12 hours. These are signs of dehydration.
- Has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to provide you with additional information about your child's care. Diagnosis, treatment and follow-up should be provided by a health care professional.