CDC Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
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Is It Strep Throat?

A sore throat can be mild or severe. When is it "strep" throat? How should you treat it? Your doctor can do a quick test and give you answers. Proper treatment can get you better faster and prevent spreading to others!

Sore throats can have a variety of causes. Viruses, bacteria, allergens, environmental irritants (such as cigarette smoke), chronic postnasal drip and fungi can all cause that unpleasant, scratchy and sometimes painful condition known as a sore throat. While many sore throats will heal without treatment, some throat infections—including strep throat—may need antibiotic treatment.

How You Get Strep Throat

Strep throat is an infection in the throat and tonsils caused by group A *Streptococcus* bacteria (called "group A strep"). Group A strep bacteria can live in a person's nose and throat. The bacteria are spread through contact with droplets from an infected person's cough or sneeze (http://phil.cdc.gov/phil/details.asp?pid=11161) . If you drink from the same glass or eat from the same plate as the sick person, you could also become ill. It is also possible to get strep throat from contact with sores from group A strep skin infections.

Common Symptoms of Strep Throat

A fever is a common symptom of strep throat.

- Sore throat, usually starting quickly
- Severe pain when swallowing
- A fever (101° F or above)
- Red and swollen tonsils, sometimes with white patches or streaks of pus

- Tiny red spots (petechiae) on the soft or hard palate—the area at the back of the roof of the mouth
- Headache
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck
- Body aches
- Rash

Is it Strep? A Simple Test Gives Fast Results

A strep test (a quick swab of the throat) can quickly show if group A strep bacteria are causing a sore throat. **A test is needed to tell if you have strep throat; just looking at your throat is not enough to make a diagnosis.** If the test is positive, your doctor can prescribe antibiotics. If the strep test is negative, but your doctor still strongly suspects you have this infection, a culture of your throat (another sample) may be taken as another way to test for the bacteria.

Antibiotics Get You Well Fast

Antibiotics reduce the length of time you're sick and reduce your symptoms.

The strep test results will help the doctor decide if you need antibiotics. Antibiotics reduce the length of time you're sick and reduce your symptoms. Antibiotic treatment may also prevent the spread of infection to friends and family members. They can also prevent complications such as tonsil and sinus infections, and, although rare in the U.S., acute rheumatic fever (an inflammatory disease that can affect the heart, joints, skin, and brain).

Once treatment begins, you should start feeling better in just a day or two. Call your doctor if you don't feel better after taking antibiotics for 48 hours. People with strep throat should stay home from work, school, or daycare until they have taken antibiotics for at least 24 hours. Be sure to finish the entire prescription, even when you start feeling better before the medicine is all gone. Learn more about taking antibiotics for a sore throat (http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart/antibiotic-use/URI/sore-throat.html) .

Preventing Infection: Wash Those Hands

The best way to keep from getting strep throat is to wash your hands often and avoid sharing eating utensils, like forks or cups. It is especially important for anyone with a sore throat to <u>wash their hands often and cover coughs and sneezes (http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/etiquette/coughing_sneezing.html)</u>. There is no vaccine to prevent strep throat.

Page last reviewed: November 12, 2013
Page last updated: November 12, 2013
Content source: <u>National Center for Immunizations and Respiratory Diseases</u>
Page maintained by: Office of the Associate Director for Communication, Digital Media Branch, Division of Public Affairs

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