

Strep Throat and Scarlet Fever

Dear Parent or Guardian,

You are being provided with this fact sheet:

- Because you or your child may have been exposed to strep throat.
- For informational purposes only.

General Information About Strep Throat and Scarlet Fever

What are strep throat and scarlet fever?

- Strep throat is caused by group A *Streptococcus* bacteria.
- Scarlet fever occurs when the group A *Streptococcus* bacteria produces a toxin in the body that causes a rash. Not everyone who has strep throat will get scarlet fever.

Who can get them?

- Anyone can get strep throat, but it is most common in school-aged children and teens.
- Strep throat is not common in children under 3 years.
- Scarlet fever is seen most often in children between the ages of 3 and 18 years.
- Children who have scarlet fever are generally not any sicker than children with just strep throat.

What are the symptoms?

- Strep throat:
 - Fever (American Academy of Pediatrics defines fever as a temperature of 100.4°F [38°C] or higher)
 - Sore throat
 - Swollen tonsils
 - Swollen lymph nodes in the neck and throat areas
 - Other symptoms might include headache, stomach pain, nausea, or vomiting.
 - Children under 3 rarely have a sore throat but can have a runny nose with bad smell from the mouth, fever, crankiness or fussiness, and a lack of appetite.
- Scarlet fever is a red rash that makes the skin feel like sandpaper.
 - The rash is brighter red in the inner elbow, armpits, and groin area.
 - The area around the mouth may look pale.

How does group A *Streptococcus* bacteria spread?

- The bacteria that cause strep throat and scarlet fever is found in droplets from coughs, sneezes, drool (saliva), and runny noses.
- It can spread when a person who has strep throat or scarlet fever coughs or sneezes and another person breathes in the droplets.
- It can also spread by sharing utensils or cups with someone who has strep throat or scarlet fever.
- While less common, the bacteria can also spread when a person touches an object or surface that has the bacteria on it and then touches their mouth, eyes, or nose.
- Since the scarlet fever rash is the body's response to a toxin, the rash is not contagious and does not spread through touch.

How Do I Know My Child Has Strep Throat or Scarlet Fever?

A healthcare provider can take a swab of the throat to test for the bacteria that causes strep throat and scarlet fever.

If you have additional questions or are concerned your child has strep throat or scarlet fever, contact your healthcare provider. This fact sheet provides general information only.

What If My Child Has Strep Throat or Scarlet Fever?

How are strep throat and scarlet fever treated?

- **Both illnesses are treated with antibiotics prescribed by a healthcare provider.**
- Keep children comfortable, allow them to rest, make sure they drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration, and check on them often.
- Infants 3 months or younger with a fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher should be seen by their healthcare provider.
- Talk with your child's healthcare provider if you have any concerns about your child's symptoms. **If your child is showing signs of dehydration (fewer wet diapers or less urine than usual, more tired than normal, dizziness, dry tongue or lips, fewer tears) they need to be seen by a healthcare provider immediately.**

How can I help prevent group A *Streptococcus* from spreading?

- Wash hands often with soap and warm water, especially after sneezing, coughing, or wiping noses.
 - Cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
 - Avoid sharing cups, eating utensils, food, and drinks with anyone who has strep throat.
 - Thoroughly clean toys and other objects children put into their mouths with soap and water.
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Does My Child Need to Stay Home from Child Care?

Yes, children with strep throat and scarlet fever need to stay home. They can return to child care 12 hours after starting antibiotics as long as they feel well enough to participate in classroom activities.

Please follow your child care program's sickness policy.

References

American Academy of Pediatrics

- Managing Infectious Diseases in Child Care and Schools, 6th Edition. Pages 179-180
- Caring for our Children, Chapter 3 Health Promotion and Protection, 3.6 Management of Illness, 3.6.1 Inclusion/Exclusion Due to Illness

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

- Group A Streptococcal (GAS) Disease. <https://www.cdc.gov/groupastrep/diseases-public/strep-throat.html>