

# Group A Streptococcal Disease

## What is Group A Streptococcus?

Group A streptococcus (strep) is a bacteria found in a person's throat and on the skin. Infections caused by Group A strep range from mild (in most cases) to severe and life threatening (rare).

People can carry group A streptococci and not have symptoms.

## Who is at Risk?

Anyone can get group A streptococcus.

Group A strep live in the nose and throat as well as on exposed skin such as around the mouth and nose and on the legs.

## How is Group A Strep Spread?

Group A strep is spread by:

- direct contact with mucus or droplets from the nose or throat of an infected person
- contact with infected wounds or sores on the skin of an infected person.

## What Kind of Infections are Caused by Group A Strep?

- mild illness such as strep throat (a throat infection), scarlet fever (a throat infection and rash), and cellulitis or impetigo (skin infections)
  - If cellulitis is not treated, it can spread and cause more serious health problems.

- severe illness such as necrotizing fasciitis and streptococcal toxic shock syndrome.
  - Both are considered invasive group A strep diseases. These are diseases that can cause serious illness, but are rarely contagious (easily spread).

## What is Invasive Group A Strep Disease?

If the group A disease gets into parts of the body it shouldn't (such as the blood, muscles or lungs) through sores or other breaks in the skin, it can cause a rare, life-threatening infection called invasive group A streptococcus disease.

Two types of invasive infections are:

- necrotizing fasciitis (flesh-eating bacteria), which destroys muscles, fat and skin tissue
- streptococcal toxic shock syndrome, which causes a quick drop in blood pressure and organ failure. It is not the same as the "toxic shock syndrome" which is linked with tampons.

Few people who come into contact with group A strep will develop invasive group A streptococcus disease. You are at a higher risk if you:

- have chronic (long-lasting) illnesses such as cancer, diabetes or kidney disease
- take who take medicines such as steroids
- have cuts, burns, surgery incision sites or chickenpox. These may allow bacteria to enter your body.

*(over)*

Signs to watch for include:

- necrotizing fasciitis:
  - fever
  - severe pain, swelling, redness around a surgery site, cuts, scrapes, insect bites or burns
- streptococcal toxic shock syndrome:
  - fever
  - dizziness
  - confusion
  - flat red rash over large areas of the body.

If you have any of the above symptoms, call your health care provider right away.

### **How is Group A Strep Found?**

Your health care provider will swab your throat for a throat culture, take a blood sample, or swab a wound.

### **How is Group A Strep Treated?**

Your health care provider will give you a prescription for an antibiotic (medicine). Be sure to take the entire prescription as directed. Stopping the medicine before you should may not kill the bacteria.

## **How can You Prevent Spreading Group A Strep?**

To help prevent group A strep infections:

- Wash your hands well with soap and warm water, especially after going to the bathroom, after coughing or sneezing, caring for anyone who has a wound or sore throat, before preparing food, after changing diapers.
- Stay home from work, school or daycare for 24 hours after starting the antibiotic.
- Keep all wounds clean. Watch for signs of infection: redness, swelling, drainage and pain at the wound site. If you have signs of infection, call your health care provider right away.

**Adapted from the Minnesota  
Department of Health Fact Sheet Group  
A Streptococcus Commonly Asked  
Questions.**