

Strep Throat

General Information

Strep throat (streptococcal pharyngitis) is usually caused by the group A streptococcus bacteria (germ). It is common among school-age children ages 5 to 15 in the winter and spring.

Symptoms of strep throat may include:

- very sore, red throat
- rash
- ear pain
- fever higher than 101 F
- swollen neck glands
- problems swallowing
- upset stomach
- white or yellow spots on the throat
- headache
- bad breath.

Symptoms appear within five days of exposure. Strep throat is easily treated. However, if left untreated, strep throat can cause:

- arthritis (joint problems)
- rheumatic fever (red rash, tender joints, fever and heart problems)
- scarlet fever (bright red rash, sore throat and fever)
- impetigo (a rash that forms yellow, flaky crusts)
- kidney problems.

How Strep Throat Spreads

When an infected person sneezes, coughs or blows his or her nose, the bacteria can spread through the air and come in contact with your child. The bacteria can also be spread when your child comes in contact with mucus from an infected person.

It is possible to carry streptococci in your body, but never get strep throat. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one in five people who has strep throat has no symptoms.

Treating Strep Throat

Your health care provider may give your child a rapid strep test and a throat culture. He or she will rub a cotton swab on the back of your child's throat.

The rapid test can detect the bacteria in 15 to 30 minutes. If the rapid test is negative, your provider may then do a throat culture. Results of the throat culture will be available in 24 to 48 hours.

If your child has strep throat caused by bacteria, your health care provider will prescribe an antibiotic (medicine) for up to 10 days. Your child will no longer be able to spread the bacteria 24 hours after taking the medicine.

Your child should not return to school or daycare until the fever is gone and he or she has taken at least one day's worth of the antibiotic.

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To ease the painful symptoms of strep throat, your child should:

- have extra fluids, especially chicken soup, Popsicles®, Jell-O® and water
- get extra rest
- limit talking
- gargle with warm salt water (mix together 10 ounces of water, 1 teaspoon of salt and 1 teaspoon of baking soda)
- use cough drops
- not be exposed to secondhand smoke.

Preventing Strep Throat From Spreading

It is not possible to prevent strep throat, but there are precautions you can take to keep it from spreading:

- Have everyone in your house wash his or her hands often (especially after sneezing or blowing the nose, after using the bathroom and before cooking).
- Wash any dishes, glasses or utensils your child uses in hot, soapy water.

Ways to Help Prevent Getting Strep Throat Again

There are ways to help prevent your child from getting strep throat again.

After your child has taken the antibiotic for a full 24 hours, it is important to replace or sterilize (clean) some items that your child uses.

- Toothbrush:
 - put your child's toothbrush in the dishwasher and run it through the sanitary cycle, **or**
 - replace your child's toothbrush with a new one
- Mouth guard, CPAP mask and other items that cannot be thrown away or boiled in hot water:

- First step: In a bowl, mix ½ cup of vinegar with ½ cup water. Soak the item for 15 to 20 minutes.
- Second step: In another bowl, mix ½ cup of hydrogen peroxide with ½ cup water. Soak the item for another 15 to 20 minutes. Rinse the item well with water.
- Orthodontic pieces (such as a retainer):
 - Call your child's dental or orthodontic office and ask how to clean any orthodontic pieces.

You should also remove and wash your child's bed pillow linens. Run the pillow through a hot dryer cycle.

Drinking fountains can sometimes be a source of infection. Don't let your child's nose or mouth touch drinking fountains.

When To Call Your Child's Health Care Provider

Call your child's health care provider if your child:

- has a reaction to the medicine
- does not start to get better within 48 hours of taking the medicine
- has a fever that does not go away after three days
- develops a bright red skin rash
- has a cough that produces mucus
- has trouble breathing
- has trouble swallowing fluids or saliva due to increasing pain.

Call your child's health care provider if you have any other questions or concerns.