

STREP THROAT

Streptococcus group A, called beta-hemolytic strep pyogenes bacteria, causes strep throat. We like to discover and treat all cases of strep because if untreated it can be complicated by kidney inflammation, a skin rash (scarlet fever), pneumonia and rarely rheumatic fever. Rheumatic fever used to be fairly common after strep infections but it is very rare now.



The most common symptom of strep throat is a scratchy painful throat. Typically, but not always, a high fever and sore glands in the neck are also present. Strep can make you feel the sickest you have ever been, or it can be in your throat when it doesn't even bother you (especially if you are a carrier).

Scarlet fever is just strep throat with a scarlet-red sandpaper-like skin rash. It is no more serious than strep throat and it is treated exactly the same. Strep can irritate the kidney (post streptococcal glomerulonephritis), though that is quite rare. Rheumatic fever is irritation of the joints, heart valves, brain or skin following a strep infection. Effective treatment for strep infections has been partly responsible for the near disappearance of rheumatic fever.

Strep throat is fairly contagious though, oddly, some people seem to never be susceptible, even when they are exposed to it. School-aged children seem to get strep most often. It may take 2-5 days after close exposure for a person to get sick.

Throat cultures take 1-2 days to identify beta-strep. Rapid antigen tests give results in less than 10 minutes, so that's what we use here. We do not do a culture unless you specifically request it. If the culture shows a low level of strep when the rapid test is negative, the individual is usually only a carrier and the presence of strep at such a low level does not typically justify treatment.

Penicillin (or a cephalosporin or azithromycin) effectively eradicates the strep bacteria and the ability to give strep to others (contagious) after about 24 hours. However, you need to take all 10 days worth of medicine to keep strep out of your system. If you still are quite sick after 24 hours on medication, you can come in for a shot (usually of ceftriaxone-Rocephin).

Salt water gargles (1/2 tsp salt in 1 cup of water) and acetaminophen or ibuprofen may help you feel more comfortable. Be sure to take enough fluids when you are sick! Call us if you have cola-colored urine or persistent joint pains or if you aren't improving.

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