



What is group A Streptococcus?

Group A Streptococcus (Strep A) is a bacterium that can often be found in the throat and on the skin. People may carry it in their throat or on their skin and not become ill. Most Strep A infections are fairly mild illnesses such as throat and skin infections. It is very unusual for it to cause other severe infections.

What are the symptoms of a Strep A infection?

The symptoms depend on the site of infection. Strep A infection can present in various ways:

- Strep throat causes sore throat and tonsils, fever, muscle pain and tiredness
- Scarlet fever causes sore throat, fever and swollen lymph nodes accompanied by a red rash that feels rough to the touch (usually in face, neck, groin)
- Impetigo causes skin sores and blisters
- Cellulitis causes pain, redness and swelling in areas of the skin
- Necrotising fasciitis is an invasive serious skin infection that causes deep painful sores accompanied with high fever, diarrhoea/vomiting and septic shock

How is it spread?

Strep A spreads between people through sneezing, coughing, kissing and skin contact. People who are already sick with Strep A are most likely to spread the infection. Healthy people who carry the bacteria but have no symptoms are much less contagious.

What kinds of illnesses are caused by Strep A?

Some people can carry Strep A in their throat and have no symptoms – this is called ‘colonisation’. Most Strep A infections are mild illnesses.

Very rarely, Strep A causes severe infections when it gets past the body defences and enters into parts of the body where bacteria are not usually found (sterile sites) such as the blood, muscle, lungs or the brain. These infections are called ‘invasive GAS disease’ which can be life-threatening.

What should I do if I have been in contact with somebody with invasive GAS disease?

Because Strep A spreads from person to person through sneezing, coughing, kissing and skin contact, close (household) contacts are most at risk of getting Strep A. If you have been in close contact with somebody with invasive GAS disease you will be contacted by public health authorities for further assessment and advice.

How are Strep A infections treated?

Most Strep A infections are not serious and can easily be treated with regular antibiotics.



In order to prevent transmission of infection to others, people with a Strep A infection should stay away from school or work for 24 hours after starting their antibiotics.

Cases of serious infections (invasive group A strep, iGAS) need to be admitted in hospital and treated with intravenous antibiotics.

There is no available vaccine against Strep A infection.

When should I seek medical advice?

If you have a sore throat or skin sores/wounds that are not resolving and spreading it is important to see your doctor. Your doctor will assess whether the infection requires further treatment or tests accordingly.

Please note that not every case of sore throat requires antibiotics as these could be viral infections.

How can one avoid getting infected?

As with other infections, it is important to follow hygienic principles, mainly:

- Washing hands frequently with soap and water especially after coughing/sneezing and before preparing/eating food
- Covering mouth and nose when sneezing or coughing. Cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow, not your hands
- Throwing used tissues immediately in the bin