

Strep Throat

If you have strep throat, you should seek medical care because it is a contagious disease. It affects the back of the throat and the tonsils. The tissue becomes irritated and inflamed, causing a sudden, severe sore throat. It's caused by infection with Group A streptococci bacteria; and if someone in your family has strep throat, you'll know within one to three days.

The throat may be red with white patches, you may have trouble swallowing or you may have tender, swollen glands (lymph nodes) on the sides of the neck, toward the front. Usually the tonsils are red and enlarged. There also may be white craters, or specks of pus on the tonsils, or your tonsils may be covered with a gray or white coating. Other symptoms may include:

- Headache
- Abdominal (lower stomach) pain
- Fever
- General discomfort, uneasiness or ill feeling
- Loss of appetite and nausea
- Muscle pain
- Joint stiffness
- Rash

The bacteria that cause strep throat tend to inhabit the nose and throat, so sneezing, coughing or shaking hands can easily scatter the strep infection to other people.

A doctor can confirm whether you have strep by doing a rapid strep test. Treatment usually requires 10 days of treatment with an antibiotic. While recovering, you should drink plenty of cool liquids. However, you may want to avoid orange juice, grapefruit juice, lemonade or other acidic beverages since these will irritate the throat. Warm liquids like soups, tea with honey or hot chocolate can be soothing.

You will be contagious for about 24 hours after treatment starts. Therefore, it is important to stay home for at least 48 hours, until the antibiotics have had a chance to work.