

Strep throat/ Scarlet Fever

What is strep throat/scarlet fever?

Strep throat is a common infection in children caused by group A *Streptococcus* bacteria. Scarlet fever is a type of strep infection that includes both strep throat symptoms and a rash. It is also caused by group A *Streptococcus* bacteria.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of strep throat include a sudden onset of fever, sore throat (especially when swallowing), stomachache, headache, swollen lymph nodes (glands) in the neck, and decreased appetite. Strep throat is not likely to cause a runny nose, cough, or congestion, as these symptoms are more often caused by viruses, rather than the bacteria that cause strep throat. Children with scarlet fever may have the same symptoms as strep throat and also develop a sandpaper-like rash. The rash usually starts on the face or neck and spreads to the chest, arms, and legs.

How is strep diagnosed?

Healthcare providers can diagnose strep throat by using a rapid test that can provide results within the same day. In some circumstances, a throat culture may be necessary to confirm strep throat. Strep throat cannot be diagnosed just by an exam of the throat. Testing for strep throat is not recommended for those who are not experiencing symptoms.

How long does this disease last?

Symptoms begin 2 to 5 days after being exposed to the bacteria. A person with strep throat is most contagious while having symptoms and is no longer contagious within 24 hours after antibiotics are started.

How does strep throat spread?

People with strep throat or scarlet fever spread the bacteria by talking, coughing, or sneezing. People can get sick with strep throat if they:

- Breathe in respiratory droplets that have the bacteria.
- Touch their nose or mouth after touching a surface or object with the bacteria.
- Share plates, utensils, or cups with someone who has the bacteria.

What preventive measures and treatments are available?

To prevent the spread of strep throat:

- Teach children to wash their hands often with soap and water and to cover coughs and sneezes.
- Discourage children from sharing eating utensils or cups.



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- Encourage families to keep their children home when they are ill.

People diagnosed with strep throat may be prescribed antibiotics to treat the bacteria. Antibiotics can help people with strep throat feel better faster and prevent complications. Complications of strep throat include tonsil and sinus infections and acute rheumatic fever. It is important to finish all doses of antibiotics for strep throat, even if the person is feeling better.

What should schools do?

- Encourage families of children experiencing sore throat, fever, or a new rash to see a healthcare provider.
- Notify CDPH if there are 10 linked cases of strep throat/scarlet fever in the same classroom or sports team within a 10-day period.
- Notify affected families when there is a lab-diagnosed case of strep throat or scarlet fever in a classroom.

What are recommendations for exclusion?

Exclude until fever-free for 24 hours without the use of a fever-reducing medication. Children and staff in K-12 schools who test positive for strep may return to school after:

- 12 hours of appropriate antibiotic treatment AND
- They are fever-free (without the use of fever-reducing medicine) for 24 hours

Children and staff in early childcare centers who test positive for strep throat may return after:

- 24 hours of appropriate antibiotic treatment AND
- They are fever-free (without the use of fever-reducing medicine) for 24 hours

For more information on strep throat and scarlet fever, please see:

[About Strep Throat | CDC](#) and [About Scarlet Fever | CDC](#)

