

Strep throat/ Scarlet Fever

What is strep throat/ scarlet fever?

Strep throat and scarlet fever are common infections in children 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 less likely to cause runny nose, cough and congestion, as these symptoms are more often caused by viruses, rather than the bacteria that cause strep throat. Children with scarlet fever develop a sandpaper-like rash.

How is strep diagnosed?

Health care providers can diagnose strep throat by using a rapid test that can provide results within the same day. However, in some circumstances, a throat culture may be necessary to confirm the presence of the *Streptococcus* bacteria. Strep throat cannot be diagnosed just by an exam of the throat. Your health care provider will prescribe antibiotics based on the results of the test. Testing for strep in individuals who are not having symptoms is not generally recommended.

How long does this disease last?

The time from exposure to symptom onset is 2 to 5 days. The contagious period is highest during acute infection, no longer contagious within 24 hours after antibiotics.

How does *Streptococcus* bacteria spread?

The bacteria are spread through contact with respiratory droplets after an infected person talks, coughs, or sneezes. These respiratory droplets do not remain suspended in the air, but they can cause infection when they land on an uninfected person. Fomite transmission can also occur in individuals who touch their nose or eyes after touching infected respiratory droplets, or after sharing drinks and eating utensils with someone who is ill.

What preventive measures and treatments are available?

Prevention includes appropriate hygiene, including: teaching children to good respiratory and hand hygiene, and not to share eating utensils or cups, encouraging families to keep their children home when they are ill.

Individuals diagnosed with strep throat may be prescribed antibiotics to treat the bacteria. Antibiotics can decrease the length of time children are sick, help prevent the spread of infection, and prevent



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more serious complications, including tonsil and sinus infections and acute rheumatic fever. Be sure your children take all of the antibiotics prescribed, even after they start feeling better.

What should schools do?

- Encourage families of children experiencing sore throat, fever, or a new rash to be evaluated by their health care provider.
- Notify CDPH if there are 10 epidemiologically linked cases of strep throat/scarlet fever 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?

Individuals with a fever, sore throat, or new rash should be excluded from school. Individuals who test positive for strep may return to school after 24 hours of appropriate antibiotic treatment.

