

Streptococcal Infections ("Strep" Throat, Scarlet Fever)

What are streptococcal infections? Strep is a very common bacterial infection in children. It can cause strep throat and scarlet fever. Symptoms include:

- Sore and red throat, red tongue
- Bright red skin rash, which:
 - is on the cheeks, neck, chest, back, and skin folds
 - may feel rough, like sandpaper
- Fever, headache, and swollen lymph nodes ("glands") in the neck

Although strep infection is usually mild, it can cause severe illness including pneumonia, meningitis, rheumatic fever (heart), bone/joint infections, and kidney disease.

How does strep spread? It spreads by:

- Being in a room together, coughing, and sneezing
- Touching mucus from the nose or saliva
- Kissing on the lips
- Sharing food, eating utensils, and mouthed toys

When is strep contagious?

- From the day before the start of symptoms and during the period of illness, until 24 hours after the start of effective antibiotic treatment.
- After exposure, it takes two to five days to develop symptoms.

How do I know if my child has strep? If your child has the symptoms, see your doctor immediately. Strep throat is diagnosed by an exam and swab of the throat for a quick lab test or culture. Scarlet fever is diagnosed by the typical symptoms.

What should I do if my child has strep?

Treatment: Follow the treatment prescribed by your doctor:

- Take the antibiotic medication for the whole course.
- For sore throat, try cool drinks, popsicles, teas, salt water gargles.
- The doctor might recommend acetaminophen for fever.

When symptoms of strep infection are severe, further medical tests, hospitalization, and intravenous treatment may be necessary.

Keep your child home: until 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment and until the fever is gone and the child feels well enough to participate. Notify your Head Start program.

To limit the spread:

- Wipe noses with clean tissues, throw them away, and wash your hands.
- Cough and sneeze into your elbow and away from people.
- Don't share food, pacifiers, bottles, or toothbrushes. Wash eating utensils, drinking cups, and mouthed toys well between uses.

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Streptococcal Infections ("Strep" Throat, Scarlet Fever) Continued

- Don't kiss children on the mouth.
- Open windows indoors and maximize outdoor play.