



Strep Throat/Scarlet Fever

What is strep throat/scarlet fever?

Strep throat and scarlet fever are different forms of a bacterial disease caused by infection with Group A (beta hemolytic) streptococci. When the bacteria infect the throat, the illness is called strep throat.

Streptococci can also produce a toxin, which results in a distinctive skin rash. When this occurs, the illness is called scarlet fever.

How do you get strep throat/scarlet fever?

You can get strep throat/scarlet fever by close contact with persons infected with the bacteria. Occasionally, both strep throat and scarlet fever are transmitted indirectly by contact with objects used by infected persons or contaminated hands. Group A streptococci have also been associated with food borne outbreaks.

What are the symptoms of strep throat/scarlet fever?

Individuals with strep throat frequently have fever and an inflamed, painful throat with swelling of the tonsils. Patients with scarlet fever may have all of the symptoms associated with strep throat, plus a fine reddish rash. The rash commonly appears on the neck, chest, armpits, elbows, groin, and inner surfaces of the thighs. In severe cases of scarlet fever, "strawberry tongue," vomiting, and high fever may also be present. During recovery from scarlet fever, the skin may slough off the fingers and toes.

When do symptoms start?

Symptoms usually begin 1 to 3 days after exposure to Group A streptococcal bacteria.

What is the treatment for strep throat/scarlet fever?

Strep throat and scarlet fever can be treated with antibiotics prescribed by your doctor. If left untreated or only partially treated (i.e., not taking all of the prescribe medications), strep infection may occasionally lead to rheumatic fever or kidney disease.

Should people with strep throat be excluded from school or work?

Yes. Untreated individuals can transmit the bacteria for several weeks. With adequate treatment, the contagious period is reduced to 48 hours or less. Persons infected with strep throat may return to school or work after the second day of a 10-day course of antibiotic therapy.

How do you keep from getting it?

Avoid close contact with infected persons until they have completed at least 2 days of a 10-day course of antibiotic therapy. Do not drink raw (unpasteurized) milk or eat any products made from raw milk. Exclude persons with respiratory illnesses or skin lesions from food handling.