

# Facts & DETAILS

## Strep Throat

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### What is strep throat?

Strep throat is an infection in the throat or tonsils caused by the bacterium *Streptococcus pyogenes*, also called group A beta-hemolytic *Streptococcus* or "group A strep."

### How common is strep throat?

Strep throat is a common infection. People of all ages can become ill with strep throat, but it is most common in children from five to 15 years old.

### How do people become infected?

The group A strep bacteria are easily spread from person to person by sneezing or coughing. Infection occurs when a person contacts saliva or nose secretions directly on their face or shares food and drinks. Infection can also occur indirectly from touching a surface or object and then touching the nose or mouth. Kitchen utensils and bathroom objects are common sources of disease spread.

### What are the signs and symptoms of strep throat?

Common signs and symptoms of strep throat are as follows:

- Sore throat which usually starts quickly
- Severe pain when swallowing
- A fever (101 degrees Fahrenheit or above)
- Red and swollen tonsils, sometimes with white patches or streaks of pus
- Tiny red spots (petechiae) at the back of the roof of the mouth
- Headache
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck
- Body aches
- Rash

Because other illnesses cause similar symptoms, someone can have many of the symptoms listed above but be infected with a virus or have tonsillitis, instead of strep throat. If untreated, strep throat infections can sometimes cause complications such as rheumatic fever or kidney inflammation.

### How long can a person spread strep throat?

After exposure, symptoms usually appear in two to five days. Someone with strep throat is contagious for two to three weeks or until 24 hours after starting antibiotic treatment.

### Who is at risk for strep throat?

Children between ages five and 15 years old are most likely to become ill with strep throat. Crowded environments like schools or dormitories can make it easier for the bacteria to spread.

### How is strep throat treated?

Strep throat is treated with antibiotics. If you think you may have strep throat, see a healthcare provider and be tested to receive the correct treatment.

### How can you prevent strep throat?

There is no vaccine for strep throat. Good handwashing and cleanliness are the only defense to help prevent the spread of group A strep. You can help prevent infection by taking these simple steps:

- Wash hands thoroughly and often.
- Cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing and dispose of tissues properly.
- Stay home or keep children home when ill. Schools and day-care facilities often have policies that a child must be on an antibiotic for 24 hours before returning to school.
- Avoid sharing cups and eating utensils. Wash them in hot, soapy water or in a dishwasher.

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