

Strep Throat/Scarlet Fever Fact Sheet

What causes strep throat and scarlet fever?

Both diseases are caused by the bacteria group A Streptococcus of “group A strep”. Group A strep bacteria can live in a person’s nose and throat. Strep throat is an infection in the throat and tonsils. Scarlet fever is strep throat accompanied by a rash. Both diseases are usually mild.

What are the symptoms?

Strep throat : sore throat (usually starting quickly), severe pain when swallowing, fever, red and swollen tonsils, tiny red spots on the area at the back of the roof of the mouth, possibly headache, nausea and/or vomiting, swollen lymph nodes in the neck, or body aches.

Scarlet fever: a red rash that makes the skin feel like very fine sandpaper, in addition to the above symptoms for strep throat. Although the cheeks might have a flushed appearance, there may be a pale area around the mouth.

Who gets strep throat and scarlet fever?

Strep throat occurs most commonly in school-aged children and adolescents. Although anyone can get scarlet fever, it usually affects children between 5 and 12 years of age.

How is group A strep spread?

Breathing infected respiratory droplets (usually from coughing or sneezing) or direct contact with infected secretions or skin lesions. Close contact helps group A strep spread.

Is there treatment available?

YES. Antibiotics are available for strep throat and scarlet fever. Antibiotics reduce the length of time you’re sick, reduce your symptoms, and prevent more serious complications.

Can my child go to school or daycare while infected?

NO. Children cannot return to school until 24 hours after starting antibiotic treatment. This means your child is able to return to school 24 hours after the first dose of medication is taken; not when the prescription is given to you by your child’s doctor.

How can the spread of group A strep be prevented?

The best way to keep from getting infected is to wash your hands often and avoid sharing eating utensils, linens, towels or other personal items. It is especially important for anyone with a sore throat to wash his or her hands often. There is no vaccine to prevent strep throat or scarlet fever. Children with scarlet fever or strep throat should stay home from school or daycare for at least 24 hours after starting antibiotics.