

Group A Streptococcal Disease

Information Sheet

What is Group A Streptococcal Disease?

Group A Streptococcus bacteria (Group A Strep) causes a variety of infections. The most frequent conditions include sore throat (commonly called strep throat), ear infections, scarlet fever and skin infections. It is commonly found in the nose and throat of about 5 – 10 percent of healthy children and 1 percent of healthy adults who have not signs or symptoms of illness.

Can Group A Strep infection be serious?

In rare cases, a more serious infection results when the bacteria enter the bloodstream, leading to invasive infection. There are two serious forms of Group A streptococcal infection:

- **Streptococcal Toxic Shock Syndrome** is a severe infection associated with low blood pressure/shock and multi-organ failure.
- **Necrotizing Fasciitis or Flesh-eating Disease** is a soft tissue infection characterized by rapidly spreading inflammation and death of muscles and fat tissue.

How does it spread?

Group A Strep can spread through close, personal contact with an infected person, such as kissing or sharing cutlery, or direct contact with infected sores on the skin. The reason why some people develop the more serious infections is still unclear. The risk of spread is greatest when an individual is ill. People who carry the bacteria, but have no symptoms, are much less contagious.

Who is at risk?

Few people who are exposed to invasive Group A Strep develop invasive disease. Healthy people can get invasive disease, but people with chronic illnesses like cancer, diabetes and those on kidney dialysis and long term steroids are at higher risk. In addition, breaks in the skin, like cuts, surgical wounds or chickenpox, may provide an opportunity for the bacteria to enter the body.

What are the signs and symptoms of invasive Group A Strep?

Early signs and symptoms of Streptococcal Toxic Shock Syndrome include fever, dizziness, confusion, diffuse rash and abdominal pain. The early signs and symptoms of Necrotizing Fasciitis include fever, severe pain and swelling, and redness at the wound site. Unfortunately, no sign or symptom is particular only to Streptococcal Toxic Shock, making it sometimes difficult to differentiate from other illnesses.

How to prevent it from spreading:

- Children with strep throat and skin infections should not return to school or daycare until they are well after 24 hours of their antibiotic treatment.
- People with Strep A skin infection should be excluded from food handling.
- Close contacts of a person with invasive Group A Strep should seek advice from doctors about antibiotics to prevent disease.