

Strep Throat

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Strep throat is a relatively common childhood infection featuring a varying combination of fever, sore throat, poor feeding, rash, headache, and belly pain. This handout will let you know what it is, how to prevent it, and what can be done about it.

What are the symptoms?

As mentioned, the symptoms of strep throat are variable. Almost all children get a sore throat. Younger children with sore throats will turn away from foods, or begin eating and stop after only a few bites. Some children will get a fever and rash along with the sore throat (this is called "scarlet fever"). Some children will have only headache and belly pain. And still others may have a combination of many of these symptoms.

Infection with some strains of streptococcus pyogenes may lead to more serious problems later (like kidney or heart problems), so it's best to get a potential strep infection checked out by Dr. Bassett right away.

How do you get strep throat?

Strep throat is especially common in early school-age children - the 4 and 5 year-olds. It's also fairly contagious. It is caused by a very common bacterium called Streptococcus pyogenes, which can live inside the nose and throat (and many other places) of otherwise healthy children and adults. When children get sick with strep throat, the bacterium gets in the saliva, nasal discharge, and on the hands of the ill person.

From there, it's usually spread to other children by direct contact (touching) and indirect contact (sharing of personal items). Even with the strictest cleaning regimens, this disease can spread quickly through a daycare. This is why it is very important to make sure your child stays home from daycare and visits our office if he or she has any symptoms of strep throat.

How is strep throat treated?

If untreated, strep throat will go away, though it will take longer to go away - meaning more sick days, more pain, and more spread to other members of the family.

We like to do a "rapid strep" test in our office to make sure we've got the right diagnosis first. This takes about 5 minutes and is about 95% accurate. We like to treat strep throat with 5-10 days of oral antibiotics. It can also be treated with one shot of antibiotics (in the bum), but this is rarely necessary. Fever and sore throat can be treated with Tylenol or Motrin. If you're unsure about the proper use of these medicines, please call us first.

How can strep throat be prevented?

There are three main ways to prevent further strep throat infections. First, everyone in the family must observe strict handwashing to keep the strep from spreading from your hands. Second, you need to keep a clean environment by sanitizing toys, and not sharing any personal items (including eating utensils, cups, towels, face cloths, etc). It's also a good idea to get a new toothbrush for the child who is being treated for strep throat, as the bacterium can live on the old toothbrush. Start using the new toothbrush the day after your child starts his antibiotics. Third, and most importantly, all children who have strep throat should stay home and away from other children until they've been on antibiotics for at least 24 hours.

When should I call the office?

Sore throat, fever, headache and belly ache in a young child is a pretty suspicious combination, so we should probably check out kids with these symptoms. High fever (102.2F or greater) and poor feeding is

another worrisome combination. Of course, you can call us 24 hours if you have questions or would like to be seen.

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