



Strep Throat and Scarlet Fever

Patient and Family Education

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Your child's doctor or a member of your child's health care team will talk with you about specific care for your child.

What is Strep throat?

Strep throat is an infection caused by Strep bacteria (germ). It is usually found through a "quick test for Strep" or throat culture. Sometimes, the culture is positive even if the quick test is negative. If untreated, the Strep germ in the throat can cause other problems in the body such as heart or kidney problems.

If your child has Strep, his doctor will prescribe an antibiotic. You must give your child the antibiotic for the full time prescribed, even if your child seems well. This helps to make sure that all of the Strep germs are killed.

What is scarlet fever?

Scarlet fever is a Strep throat infection with a rash. The rash may itch or peel. A toxin produced by some Strep germs causes the rash. Scarlet fever is no more dangerous than Strep throat without a rash.

What are the possible symptoms?

Your child may have one or more of these:

- Sore throat
- Trouble swallowing
- Throat may appear red
- Tonsils may have white spots or pus on them
- Fever (temperature over 100.3°F) and chills
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck
- Headache
- Stomach ache or may sometimes vomit
- Some children may also have ear pain

If your child has scarlet fever, he may also have:

- A fine, raised sandpaper-type rash on the body
- The itchy rash may last four to five days

How is Strep treated?

Some general guidelines to follow include giving your child:

- Antibiotics as prescribed by his doctor. Be sure to give your child the antibiotic for the full time prescribed, even if your child feels better.
- Wash your hands and your child's hands often and well for 20 seconds to help stop the spread of infection.
- Do not share toothbrushes, eating utensils or kiss on the lips.
- Replace toothbrush after taking antibiotic for 24 hours.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Strep Throat and Scarlet Fever, continued

- Give acetaminophen (Tylenol or less costly brand) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil or less costly store brand) for fever or pain if advised by your doctor. Follow the directions on the box carefully or ask your child's doctor how much medicine to give.

DO NOT:

- Give your child more than 5 doses of acetaminophen in a 24-hour period.
- Give acetaminophen to babies younger than 3 months old without talking with your child's doctor.
- Give ibuprofen to babies younger than 6 months old without talking with your child's doctor.
- Give acetaminophen and ibuprofen together.
- Alternate these medicines.
- Keep your child away from cigarette smoke and odor.
- Use throat lozenges (for children age 8 or older), sprays or salt water gargles, as advised by your child's doctor for throat pain.
- Give plenty of cool liquids to drink. Popsicles may also help.
- Avoid spicy or sour foods. Give your child soft, bland foods.
- Not making him eat foods if he wants only liquids.

When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor if your child has any of these:

- Does not smile or show interest in play for at least a few minutes during a four-hour period.
- The pain gets worse or does not get better with treatment.
- Begins drooling.
- Has more pain on one side of the throat than the other.
- Cannot open his mouth wide.
- Has a hard time swallowing.
- Has a muffled voice.
- Has a new rash.
- Has pain when he moves his neck.
- Has increased neck size or swelling.
- Shows signs of dehydration (drying out) such as:
 - No urine in six to eight hours in an infant less than 1 year old
 - No urine in more than eight hours in a child older than 1 year old
 - No tears when crying
 - Sunken eyes
 - Dry lips and mouth
- Has a fever after taking the antibiotic for 48 hours (call during office hours).
- Has any other problems.

Also call if:

- You have questions or concerns about how your child looks or feels.
- Your child has Strep and other family members develop a sore throat or fever.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Strep Throat and Scarlet Fever, continued

When can my child return to day care or school?

The Strep germ is very contagious (passes easily from one person to another). Your child should not go to school or be around other children until he is fever free for 24 hours and on antibiotics for 24 hours. This helps stop the Strep germ from spreading to other children.

Strep throat can spread to others in the family. Anyone living in your home that develops symptoms of a sore throat in the next five days should see a doctor for a throat culture.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.