

STREPTOCOCCAL PHARYNGITIS

(Strep throat, Strep tonsillitis)

Most sore throats accompany a cold or flu and are caused by viruses. They are usually somewhat painful and annoying but last only 2-4 days and go away on their own without antibiotics.

Strep throat is a throat infection caused by Streptococcus bacteria. If left untreated it can lead to more serious problems such as rheumatic fever or nephritis. Fortunately both conditions are very uncommon.

Strep bacteria are spread by infected nose or throat mucus either through the air (sneezing or coughing) or by direct contact. Illness begins 12 hours to 5 days after exposure.

Symptoms

Fever, headache, stomachache, and tender swollen lymph nodes in the neck often accompany a sore throat caused by strep. The tonsils are usually bright red and swollen and may have white or yellow patches on them. A rash consisting of tiny red bumps may be present. This rash fades after several days but is often followed by flaking or peeling of the skin 1-3 weeks later.

When to Call a Physician

You should call if you feel frightened or worried about your illness. You should call a physician if you develop signs of dehydration such as having decreased urine output or feeling lightheaded with standing. If pain and fever persist more than 5 days into therapy, call a physician.

Diagnosis

Using a swab of your tonsils, lab technicians can detect strep by either the rapid strep test or by culture. The rapid strep test takes only minutes but isn't quite as sensitive as a culture. Therefore, if your rapid test was negative for strep but your symptoms were consistent with the diagnosis, a culture will be obtained. The culture results will be available in 24-48 hours. Delaying treatment while awaiting a positive culture does not increase the risk of complications.

Treatment

Penicillin is the most common antibiotic used to treat strep throat. Failure to complete the prescribed course commonly results in a return of the illness. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) helps relieve aches and sore throat. Gargling with warm salt water (1 teaspoon salt + 1 cup water), drinking warm tea with honey, or sucking on Popsicle's relieves a sore throat.