



What is Group A *Streptococcus* (GAS)?

Group A *Streptococcus* is a bacterium found in the human throat or on the skin. There are approximately 300 cases of invasive GAS infection, which is a more serious type of strep infection, reported in Illinois each year. Single cases of non-invasive strep infections such as strep throat are not reportable but public health should be informed of outbreaks in settings such as schools, long term care and group homes.

What kind of illnesses does Group A *Streptococcus* infection cause and what are the symptoms?

Some persons with GAS infections experience no signs or symptoms. For those with symptoms, the most common illnesses are strep throat and a skin infection called impetigo. Symptoms of these illnesses are described below.

- Strep throat – swollen tonsils possibly covered with a grayish-white film, swollen lymph nodes, fever with or without chills, painful swallowing and headache.
- Impetigo - mild skin infection accompanied by open, draining sores and other general symptoms of GAS infection such as fever, swollen lymph nodes and a sore throat.

Anyone suspected of having an infection with Group A *Streptococcus* should immediately seek medical care for testing and treatment. Though common, some types of GAS infections can become very serious if untreated.

How is Group A *Streptococcus* spread?

GAS can be spread from any individual who harbors the bacteria even if they do not have any symptoms. Persons without symptoms are usually less contagious. The bacteria are transmitted from person to person by direct contact with mucus or secretions (e.g. nasal secretions) from an infected person. Transmission occurs less frequently through indirect contact with articles or objects handled by an infected person. The time from exposure to illness is one day to three days.

Untreated individuals can be contagious for 10 days to 21 days or longer. An infected person is typically no longer infectious after the first 24 hours of appropriate antibiotic treatment.

How is Group A *Streptococcus* diagnosed and treated?

Depending on the type of infection suspected, specific laboratory tests will be conducted to confirm the diagnosis. If the diagnosis is confirmed, treatment with the proper antibiotic is indicated. As with any antibiotic use, it is important to complete the entire course as prescribed by your health care provider.

Is there any way to reduce the chances of getting a GAS infection?

As with most communicable diseases, the spread of group A *Streptococcus* infections may be reduced by good hygiene. Effective handwashing after coughing or sneezing and before preparing foods or eating is essential. Persons with fever and prolonged sore throats should be seen by a doctor for testing. If GAS infection is diagnosed, the person should stay home from work, school or day care until fever free and 24 hours or more after taking an antibiotic.

Parents should inform the school if their child is diagnosed with a strep infection so other children can be observed for symptoms. Schools will monitor the illnesses and report outbreaks to the local health department. Early reporting can help prevent the spread of Streptococcal infections.

For further information contact:
Communicable Disease Control Section • Illinois Department of Public Health
217-782-2016
or your local health department.