

GROUP A STREPTOCOCCAL (GROUP A STREP) **FACT SHEET**

What is group A strep?

Group A strep is a bacteria that can cause many different infections ranging from minor illnesses to very serious and deadly diseases, including strep throat, scarlet fever, impetigo, and others.

How is group A strep spread?

These bacteria are spread through direct contact with mucus from the nose or throat of persons who are infected or through contact with infected wounds or sores on the skin. Ill persons, such as those who have strep throat or skin infections, are most likely to spread the infection.

What are the signs and symptoms of group A strep?

Signs and symptoms may vary depending on the type of infection, i.e., strep throat, streptococcal toxic shock syndrome (STSS), necrotizing fasciitis (occasionally described as "the flesh-eating bacteria"), etc.

Signs of strep throat include:

- Sore throat
- Pain when swallowing
- Fever
- Swollen tonsils
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck

Signs of scarlet fever include:

- Very red, sore throat
- Fever (101°F or higher)
- Red rash that has a sandpaper feel
- Bright red skin in the creases of the underarm, elbow, and groin

- Whitish coating on the tongue early in the illness
- "Strawberry" (red and bumpy) tongue
- Swollen glands in the neck

Signs and symptoms of necrotizing fasciitis include:

- A red or swollen area of skin that spreads quickly
- Severe pain, including pain beyond the area of the skin that is red or swollen
- Fever
- Ulcers, blisters, or black spots on the skin
- Changes in the color of the skin
- Pus or oozing from the infected area
- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Diarrhea or nausea

Early signs and symptoms of STSS may include:

- Fever
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Low blood pressure
- Rash
- Abdominal pain

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

It usually takes two to five days for someone exposed to group A strep to become sick. Signs and symptoms may vary, depending on the type of infection caused by group A strep.

Who is most at risk?

Most people will have a throat or skin infection, and some may have no symptoms at all.

Although healthy people can get invasive GAS disease, people with chronic illnesses like cancer, diabetes, and kidney dialysis, and those who use medications such as steroids have a higher risk.

What type of health problems are caused by group A strep?

Severe, sometimes life-threatening, group A strep disease may occur when bacteria get into parts of the body where bacteria usually are not found, such as the blood, muscle, or the lungs. These infections are termed "invasive group A strep disease."

Two of the most severe, but least common, forms of invasive group A strep disease are necrotizing fasciitis and Streptococcal Toxic Shock Syndrome (STSS). Necrotizing fasciitis destroys muscles, fat, and skin tissue. Streptococcal toxic shock syndrome (STSS), causes blood pressure to drop rapidly and organs (i.e., kidney, liver, lungs) to fail. STSS is not the same as the "toxic shock syndrome" frequently associated with tampon usage.

How is group A strep diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will look for specific signs and symptoms and may conduct various tests, such as throat swab, throat culture or imaging such as an MRI, to detect the type of group A strep.

How is group A strep treated?

Group A strep is treated with antibiotics. Some forms of group A strep, such as

necrotizing fasciitis, may require surgery to remove infected tissues in addition to antibiotic treatment.

How can group A strep be prevented?

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, and put your used tissue in the waste basket.
- Cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow, if you don't have a tissue.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Use an alcohol-based hand rub if soap and water are not available.
- Wash glasses, utensils and plates after someone who is sick uses them.
- Clean all minor cuts and injuries that break the skin (like blisters and scrapes) with soap and water.
- Clean and cover draining or open wounds with clean, dry bandages until they heal.
- See a doctor for puncture and other deep or serious wounds.
- Care for fungal infections like athlete's foot.

If you have an open wound or skin infection, avoid spending time in:

- Hot tubs
- Swimming pools
- Natural bodies of water (i.e., lakes, rivers, oceans)

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention](#)
- [Utah Department of Health](#)

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