



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Strep Throat/Scarlet Fever

What is strep throat/scarlet fever?

Strep throat and scarlet fever are diseases caused by infection with group A streptococci (GAS). When the bacteria infect the throat, the illness is called strep throat. Some strains of streptococci can also produce a poison which results in a skin rash. When this occurs, the illness is called scarlet fever.

How do you get strep throat/scarlet fever?

You can get strep throat/scarlet fever by close contact with persons infected with GAS. Occasionally, both strep throat and scarlet fever are transmitted indirectly by contact with objects used by infected persons. GAS bacteria have also been linked to diseases that are spread by food.

What are the symptoms of strep throat/scarlet fever?

The symptoms of strep throat include sudden start of fever, sore throat and swollen glands in the neck. Patients with scarlet fever may have all of the symptoms associated with strep throat, plus a fine, reddish rash that feels like sandpaper. During recovery from scarlet fever, the skin may peel off the fingers and toes. If you suspect you have a strep infection, you should check with your doctor. There is a quick and effective test for strep that can be performed in your doctor's office.

When do symptoms start?

Symptoms usually begin 1 to 3 days after exposure to group A streptococcal bacteria.

What is the treatment for strep throat/scarlet fever?

Strep throat and scarlet fever can be treated with medicines prescribed by your doctor. If left untreated or only partially treated (i.e., not taking all of the prescribed medications), strep infection may lead to serious complications such as rheumatic fever or kidney disease.

Should people with strep throat stay home from school or work?

Yes. Untreated individuals can spread the bacteria for several weeks or longer. Once the correct medicine is started, the contagious period is reduced to 24 hours. Persons infected with strep throat may return to school or work 24 hours after beginning medicines prescribed by a doctor.

How do you keep from getting it?

Avoid close contact with infected persons until they have completed at least 24 hours of a course of medicine prescribed by a doctor.

Do not drink raw (unpasteurized) milk or eat any products made from raw milk.

Persons with respiratory illnesses or cuts and scrapes on the hands should not prepare food for large gatherings or in restaurants.

For more information, see the CDC's website at

<https://www.cdc.gov/groupastrep/diseases-public/index.html>