

# Group A Streptococcal Infections



Region of Waterloo  
PUBLIC HEALTH

## Group A Strep infections

Group A streptococcus (Strep) bacteria are commonly found in the nose and throat and on the skin, especially in children. This bacteria can cause illnesses such as “strep” throat, scarlet fever and skin infections (impetigo or cellulitis). In rare instances it can cause more serious infections in previously healthy persons. These infections include necrotizing fasciitis (referred to in the media as “flesh-eating disease”) or streptococcal toxic shock syndrome (sometimes referred to as “Jim Henson disease”). While rare, these infections have been increasing over the last few years.

## How are these more serious infections from Group A Strep spread?

- They are spread by **direct** contact with secretions from the nose or throat of an infected person, or by direct contact with secretions from infected sores on the skin
- Casual contact such as that in a worksite or school classroom rarely results in infections
- Children with chickenpox have a higher risk of developing skin infections from this bacteria including necrotizing fasciitis

## What is the usual treatment?

- Group A Strep infections are treated with antibiotics
- The person is not infectious after twenty-four hours of appropriate antibiotic treatment
- Severe infections require emergency medical treatment and hospitalization

## What are the signs of infection?

- A person may not have any signs or symptoms and simply carry the bacteria in their throat for a period of time
- A sore throat accompanied by a fever or rash may indicate strep throat
- Streptococcal Toxic Shock Syndrome may start with flu-like symptoms (fever, chills, tiredness) that become increasingly severe (shock, disorientation and multi-system organ involvement)
- Necrotizing Fasciitis may occur hours to days after a small wound or bruise and is most often associated with extreme pain that is out of proportion to the original injury. The skin may be red, hot, swollen or blistered

## How can Group A Strep infections be prevented?

- Wash your hands frequently to remove germs (especially before eating)
- Cover your mouth into your upper sleeve (not hands) when coughing or sneezing and dispose of soiled tissues in the garbage (and then wash your hands)
- Thoroughly cleanse wounds or cuts with soap and water
- Stay home if you are ill to prevent passing germs to others
- See your doctor if you develop signs of illness/infection
- Get your children immunized against chickenpox (unless they have had chickenpox in the past)
- Children who have chickenpox should be encouraged not to scratch, wash their hands and be observed daily for any signs of secondary infection in their skin lesions

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## Region of Waterloo Public Health

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