

Group A Streptococcal Disease

What is group A streptococcal disease?

Group A streptococcal (GAS) disease describes a group of infections that are caused by the bacteria *Streptococcus pyogenes*, group A (also known as *Streptococcus A*). These bacteria are commonly found on the skin and in the throat of healthy individuals.

The infections typically begin in the throat (strep throat) or skin (impetigo). However, severe and rare life-threatening GAS disease can sometimes occur when the bacteria get into parts of the body where bacteria usually are not found, such as blood, muscle, or the lungs. These infections are termed invasive **GAS disease (iGAS)**.

Two of the most severe, but least common, forms of iGAS are necrotizing fasciitis and streptococcal toxic shock syndrome. Necrotizing fasciitis, also known as “flesh-eating” disease is a rapidly progressing disease which destroys muscles, fat and skin tissue. Without surgery and medical assistance, the infection can lead to death. Streptococcal toxic shock syndrome results in rapid drop in blood pressure and causes organs such as the kidneys, liver or lungs to fail.

What are the symptoms of group A streptococcal disease?

Some people with GAS disease may have no symptoms. Symptoms in others are largely dependant on the part of the body infected.

- Early symptoms of necrotizing fasciitis include severe pain and swelling, often rapidly getting worse, fever and redness around a wound
- Early symptoms of streptococcal toxic shock syndrome include fever; sudden severe pain, often in an arm or leg; dizziness; confusion; feelings of having the “flu”; and a flat red rash over large areas of the body
- Symptoms of GAS disease of the throat include fever, sore throat, tender neck glands and swollen tonsils that may have pus on them. Ear infections may also develop.
- Symptoms of group A streptococcal disease of the skin include blisters on the skin that can break and leak yellow-coloured fluid. Blisters then dry and crust over.
- Symptoms of septicaemia (blood poisoning) include fever, chills, headache, generally not feeling well, pale skin, lack of energy, rapid breathing, and increased heart rate

Symptoms may develop one to three days following exposure to the bacteria but can vary depending on the site and type of GAS infection.

For further information, please call:
York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653
TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit www.york.ca

