



August 2011

# Strep Throat/Scarlet Fever

## What is Strep Throat and Scarlet Fever?

Both strep throat and scarlet fever are illnesses caused by a bacteria called group A Streptococcus. Strep throat is among the most common bacterial infections of childhood and is primarily seen among children five to 15 years of age. It most frequently occurs during the first few years of school.

Scarlet fever is a more serious illness as it may lead to rheumatic fever if not treated with antibiotics. It is usually associated with pharyngeal throat infections. However, it may follow streptococcal infections at other sites, such as wound infections.

## Symptoms of Strep Throat and Scarlet Fever

Strep Throat	Scarlet Fever
• Fever	• Fever at or above 38.30C
• Sore throat	• Reddened sore throat
• Headache	• Fatigue
• Stomach ache	• Red rash on neck, axilla, elbow, groin and inner surface of thighs
• Swollen and tender neck glands	• Flushed cheeks
• Swollen and bright red tonsils with white spots	
• Nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain are common in children	

There is a wide spectrum of clinical severity with strep throat. The fever usually goes away within three to five days and the balance of symptoms are usually gone within a week. However, it may take several more weeks for tonsils and lymph nodes to return to their usual size.

With scarlet fever, the rash usually appears on the second day of clinical illness as a diffuse red blush, with many points of deeper red that blanch on pressure. It usually begins looking like a bad sunburn with tiny bumps, and it may itch. Often there is a clear unaffected area around the mouth. It is often first noted over the upper part of the chest and then spreads to the remainder of the trunk, neck and extremities. Skin folds of the neck, axillae, groin, elbows and knees appear as lines of deeper red colour. The sweat glands are often blocked resulting in a sandpaper texture to the skin. There are small, red hemorrhagic spots on the hard and soft palates. The tongue is initially covered with a yellowish white coat through which may be seen the red papillae (white strawberry tongue). Later the coating disappears, and the tongue is red in appearance (red strawberry tongue). The skin rash fades over the course of a week and is followed by extensive peeling of the skin that lasts for several weeks.

For further information, please call:  
**York Region Health Connection 1-800-361-5653**  
**TTY 1-866-252-9933 or visit [www.york.ca](http://www.york.ca)**

When scarlet fever occurs because of a throat infection, the fever typically stops within three to five days and the sore throat passes soon afterward.

## How Strep Throat and Scarlet Fever spreads

The bacterium is found in saliva. The bacteria spreads in the air when the infected person speaks, coughs or sneezes. Symptoms usually begin within one to three days after contracting the infection (incubation period).

To prevent the spread to others, the infected individual should:

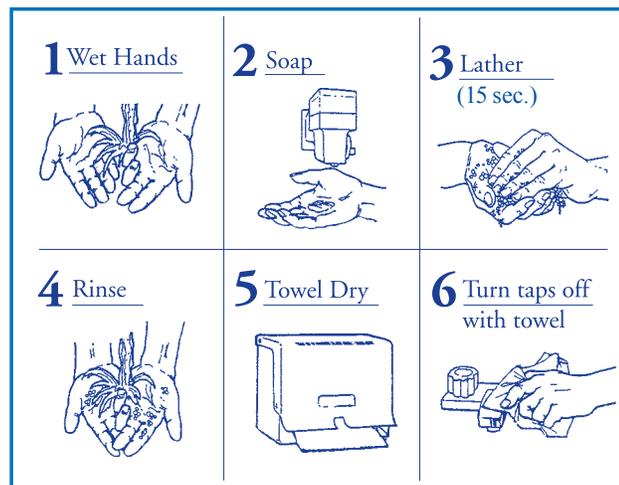
- Visit the doctor if he/she has signs or symptoms of strep throat
- Take all medicine (antibiotics) as instructed by the doctor
- Stay at home until finished taking antibiotics for at least 24 hours. This prevents exposing others to the bacteria.
- Wash hands frequently, especially after wiping one's nose, sneezing, coughing, and before preparing or eating food
- Wash towels and pillow cases frequently
- Cover mouth or nose when sneezing or coughing

## Treating Strep Throat and Scarlet Fever

Your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic for treatment of strep throat or scarlet fever. Supportive measures include drinking fluids or eating popsicles to ease the pain associated with a sore throat. Acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol) may ease the discomfort of a fever and a sore throat. A person is no longer contagious after being on antibiotics for 24 hours.

## Preventing Strep Throat and Scarlet Fever

There is no vaccine to prevent strep throat or scarlet fever. The most effective method of prevention is frequent hand washing.



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