



Frequently Asked Questions: What parents need to know and do about strep

What is the difference between non-invasive and invasive strep?

Non-invasive strep is very common, and is what we most often hear about. This type of strep most often causes a sore throat or mild skin infection. However, in very rare cases, strep can become invasive and cause several types of more serious infections. Rarely, these bacteria can cause severe and sometimes life-threatening diseases. This can happen 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."

How common is invasive strep?

It is important for parents to know that **invasive strep infection is rare**, and it is very rare for invasive strep infections to spread from one person to another.

Why do some people not get sick from the bacteria but others get seriously ill?

Most people who get strep have a mild throat or skin infection, and some may have no symptoms at all. Very few people who come in contact with strep will develop invasive strep infections but rarely the bacteria can cause severe and sometimes life-threatening diseases. People with chronic illnesses like cancer, diabetes, and chronic heart or lung disease, and those who use medications such as steroids have a higher risk of getting invasive strep infections. People with skin lesions, the elderly, and adults with a history of alcohol abuse or injection drug use also have a higher risk for the invasive type of disease.

Although it is rare for otherwise healthy people to get invasive strep, sometimes healthy people have isolated instances that result in unfortunate progression to invasive disease that is severe, and rarely life-threatening.

Are there preventive antibiotics for invasive strep?

Unlike with meningococcus bacteria, there is no routine recommendation for providing preventive antibiotics for invasive strep, and we do not have a lot of information about how well preventive antibiotics work. Preventive antibiotics are also not routinely recommended because it is very rare for invasive strep infections to spread from one person to another.

How can I prevent the spread of strep?

The best way to prevent the spread of strep is to wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water, especially after coughing and sneezing and before preparing foods or eating. Also, if you or a family member is sick, that person should be seen by a doctor and stay home from work, school, or child care. As a general precaution, you should not share personal care items, bottles, pacifiers, drinks, silverware, etc. This is good practice in general for preventing disease.



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How is non-invasive strep spread?

The common, non-invasive strep is spread through direct contact with mucus from the nose or throat of people who are sick with a strep infection or through contact with infected wounds or sores on the skin. The bacteria may also be spread through contact with people without symptoms but who carry the bacteria in their throat or on their skin. People who are ill, such as those who have strep throat or skin infections, are most likely to spread the infection. People who carry the bacteria but have no symptoms are much less contagious. It is not likely that household items like toys spread these bacteria. However, it is possible to spread these bacteria by drinking from the same glass or eating from the same plate as someone who is ill with a strep infection like strep throat.

How is invasive strep spread?

The rare, invasive type of strep infections do not easily spread from one person to another.

What are the symptoms of non-invasive strep?

The most common symptoms are sore throat and minor skin infections.

What are the symptoms of invasive strep?

The symptoms of invasive strep include flu-like symptoms, such as fever, chills, and muscle aches; rash; sore throat; sudden onset of generalized or localized severe pain; dizziness; confusion; nausea; and vomiting.

How long before someone develops symptoms after being exposed to strep?

It takes one to five days for symptoms to appear after being exposed to strep.

What should you do if you or your child has symptoms of non-invasive strep?

If anyone in your family has symptoms of strep, keep that person home and contact your doctor. People with sore throats should be seen by a doctor who can run tests to find out whether the illness is strep throat. If the test result shows strep throat, you should stay home from work, school, or child care until 24 hours after taking an antibiotic.