

Group A Streptococcal (GAS) Infections Information Sheet

What are GAS Infections?

Group A *Streptococcus* (GAS) is a type of bacteria (germ) that is often found on the skin or in the throat of healthy people. Strep throat and impetigo (a skin infection) are common and relatively mild conditions caused by this germ. Occasionally, if GAS enters the blood, lungs or muscles, life-threatening illness can occur, including necrotizing fasciitis (also called “flesh eating disease”), Streptococcal Toxic Shock Syndrome (causing kidney, liver, and lung failure), and scarlet and rheumatic fevers (which may result in heart damage).

How can you catch GAS Infections?

The bacteria are spread through direct contact with the mucus from the nose or throat of GAS infected persons or through contact with GAS infected wounds or sores on the skin. You can also become infected by eating from the same plate or drinking from the same glass as an infected person. Treating an infected person with an antibiotic for 24 hours or longer usually prevents the spread of the bacteria to others.

What are the symptoms of GAS Infections?

GAS symptoms will depend on the location and type of infection. Some examples are:

Strep throat

- Sore throat, severe pain when swallowing
- Fever (101°F or above)
- Red, swollen tonsils, sometimes with white patches or streaks of pus
- Tiny red spots in the back of the roof of the mouth
- Headache, nausea, or vomiting
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck
- Body aches or rash

Necrotizing fasciitis

- Pain/soreness, like a “pulled muscle”; gets severe
- Warm red or purple areas of swelling on skin
- Blisters, sores, or black spots on the skin
- Fever, chills, fatigue (tiredness) or vomiting

Streptococcal Toxic Shock Syndrome

- Sudden onset of generalized or localized pain, often in the arm or leg
- Dizziness and confusion
- Flu-like symptoms such as fevers, chills, muscle aches, nausea, vomiting
- Sometimes flat red rash over large areas of body

How can you be treated for GAS Infections?

GAS infections are treated with antibiotics. Your healthcare provider will evaluate your symptoms to choose the appropriate antibiotic and medical treatment. It is important to always finish all antibiotics as prescribed. Serious disease may require hospitalization or surgery, and can result in death.

How can you prevent GAS Infections?

The spread of all GAS infections can be reduced by good hand washing practices, particularly after coughing, sneezing or contact with wounds, and before any food preparation or consumption. All wounds should be kept clean, covered, and watched for possible signs of infection. Ill persons should stay home from school or work until 24 hours after starting antibiotics, or until the medical provider clears them to return.