

# Strep Throat

## What is strep throat?

Strep throat is an infection of the throat caused by bacteria called Streptococci. There are different types of streptococci. The type that causes serious sore throats and needs to be treated with antibiotics is called group A strep.

## What is the cause?

Strep infections are very contagious. They are usually passed directly from person to person. Strep throat is common in school-age children. Children under 2 years old and adults not exposed to children are much less likely to get strep throat. Strep is most common from November through April, but it can happen any time of year.

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may include:

- Sore, red throat
- Painful swallowing
- Swollen, tender lymph nodes ("glands") in the neck
- Fever
- Chills
- Headaches
- Fine red rash on trunk and arms
- Muscle aches and pains
- Tired feeling
- Loss of appetite

## How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you. Usually you will have a strep test. Your provider will rub a cotton swab against a tonsil in the back of your throat to get a sample of bacteria. The sample will be tested in the lab. The results will be available in an hour or less if the rapid antibody test is done, or in 1 to 2 days if a throat culture test is done.

## How is it treated?

If your healthcare provider suspects you have strep, he or she may prescribe an antibiotic before you have all the results from the lab tests. This medicine may be taken as pills or given as a shot.

The symptoms of strep throat may go away as soon as 24 hours after you start treatment. The symptoms rarely last longer than 5 days.

It is very important to take all of the prescribed medicine, even after the symptoms have gone away, to keep the infection from coming back. Strep needs to be treated so you can prevent serious problems it might cause, such as rheumatic fever, which can lead to heart disease.

Not getting treatment for strep throat or not taking all the medicine prescribed can lead to rheumatic fever. Rheumatic fever is a reaction to strep infection that can damage the heart valves and affect your joints and nervous system.

## **How can I take care of myself?**

Follow the full treatment prescribed by your healthcare provider.

For a sore throat:

- Make sure you have enough fluids. Drink clear soup, cold drinks, and other clear, nutritious liquids. If eating hurts your throat, don't force yourself to eat solid food. When you are able to eat more foods, choose healthy food to give you strength and to help fight the infection.
- Do not smoke. Do not breathe second-hand smoke.
- Gargle with salt water.
- Suck on lozenges or hard candy.
- Don't talk a lot. Rest your voice.
- Use a humidifier or vaporizer to add moisture to the air.
- Put warm compresses on your neck.

If you have a fever, rest and limit your activities until the fever is gone.

Ask your healthcare provider if you can take acetaminophen, aspirin, or ibuprofen to reduce your fever and to relieve pain.

- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen and aspirin, may cause stomach bleeding and other problems. These risks increase with age. Read the label and take as directed. Unless recommended by your healthcare provider, you should not take this medicine for more than 10 days for any reason.
- Check with your healthcare provider before you give any medicine that contains aspirin or salicylates to a child or teen. This includes medicines like baby aspirin, some cold medicines, and Pepto-Bismol. Children and teens who take aspirin are at risk for a serious illness called Reye's syndrome.

## **How can I help prevent strep throat?**

The following suggestions may help you prevent spread of a strep infection to others.

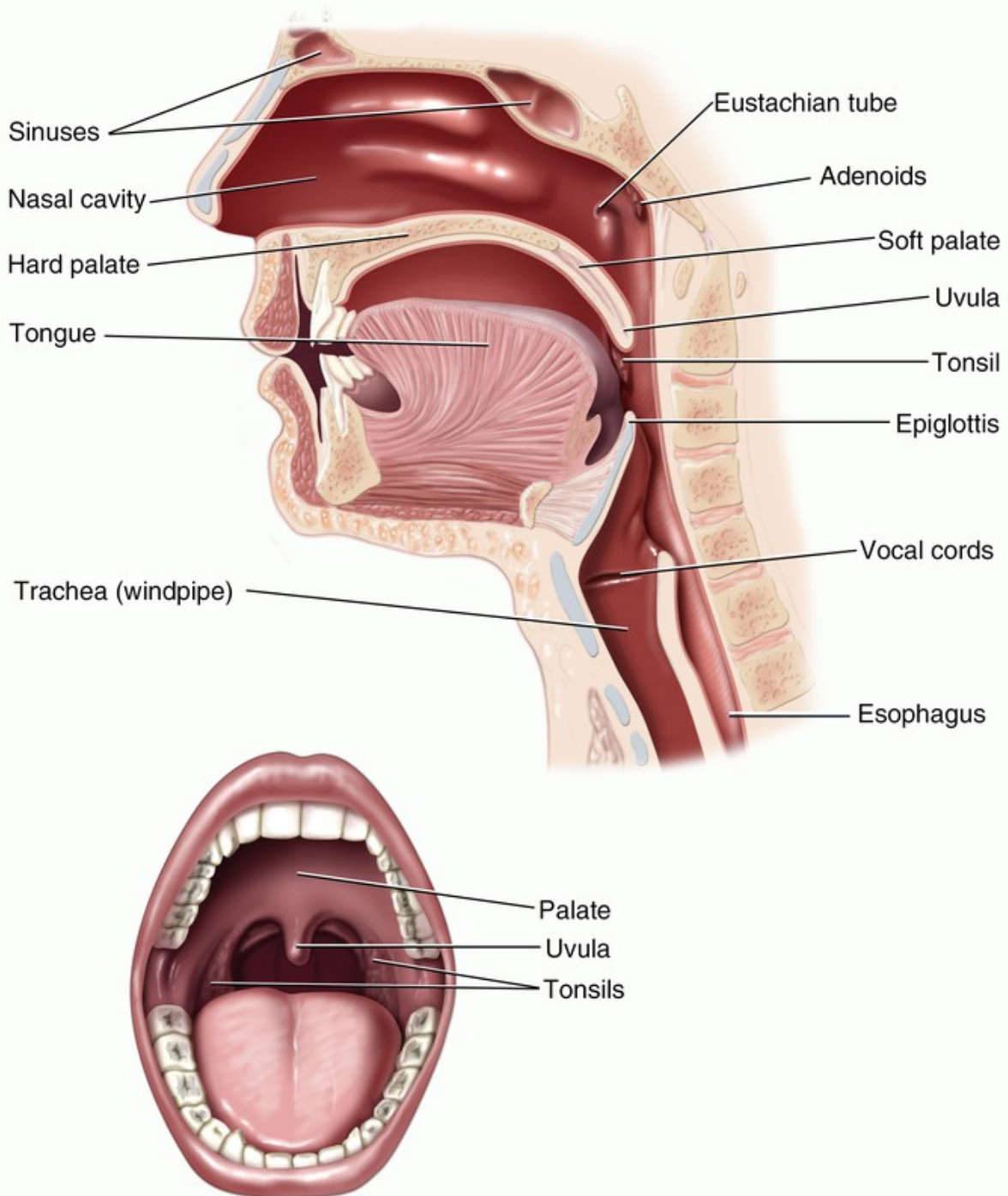
- Hand washing is the best method of prevention. Wash your hands before you touch food, dishes, glasses, silverware, napkins, etc.
- Wash your hands after you cough. Use tissues when you cough and dispose of them so that others won't come in contact with them.

- Avoid close contact with other people, including kissing and hugging, until you have taken the antibiotic for 24 to 48 hours.
- Use paper cups, or separate cups, and paper towels in bathrooms instead of shared drinking cups and hand towels.
- Don't share food and eating utensils with others.
- Be careful not to let your nose or mouth touch public telephones or drinking fountains.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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# Head and Throat



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