Non-Invasive Group A Streptococcus (GAS)- Factsheet

What is non-invasive GAS?

There is a group of bacteria called group A *Streptococcus* (*Streptococcus pyogenes* also called group A strep) which are commonly found in the throat and on the skin of healthy people. Sometimes those germs cause sore throat or skin infections, the non-invasive type of GAS infection (meaning that it does not spread to or damage internal organs and tissues). The invasive form of GAS disease involves the germs invading parts of the body that are normally free from germs such as blood and certain fluids in the body, deep muscle and tissues, or the lung. There are a range of diseases caused by non-invasive GAS including strep throat (acute pharyngitis), scarlet fever, and impetigo.

What are the symptoms of non-invasive GAS?

Symptoms depend on the particular disease. Strep throat involves swollen red sore throat and tonsils often with a white coating, fever, headache, swollen neck lymph nodes and possibly abdominal pain, nausea, and vomiting, especially in children. Scarlet fever develops in some people who have strep throat and is almost always accompanied by a sore throat and high fever along with a quickly spreading red skin rash that feels like sandpaper on the body and maybe red swollen lips and red spots on the tongue. Impetigo also may include a red skin rash that looks like a group of small blisters or red bumps that burst and release fluid that dries, and then the blisters become coated with a yellow or grey crust. The sores usually occur around the nose and mouth but can be spread to other areas of the body.

How is non-invasive GAS spread?

Non-invasive GAS is spread from person to person usually through saliva (spit), by hands with GAS on them that are not washed, or through direct physical contact with infected skin wounds or sores. People who have GAS in their throats and noses but are not sick are less likely to pass the germs on to others. Crowded settings like daycare centers or dormitories may make it easier for the germs to pass from person to person.

How long are people contagious?

A sick person will not pass the germs on to others after they have taken antibiotics for at least 24 hours.

Who gets non-invasive GAS?

Anyone can get strep throat or a minor GAS skin infection.

What treatment is available for people with non-invasive GAS?

If you are infected with non-invasive GAS, a healthcare provider will usually prescribe antibiotics. Remember that it is important that you finish the entire course of treatment to prevent complications, especially rheumatic fever which is a disease that can affect the heart, joints, brain and skin. If left untreated, scarlet fever can result in more-serious conditions that affect the heart, kidneys and other parts of the body.

Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work or daycare?

Anyone diagnosed with GAS infection should not go to school, daycare, or work, if they are a health care worker or food handler, until antibiotics have been taken for at least 24 hours.

How can I protect myself and my family from getting non-invasive GAS?

Practicing good hygiene, like washing your hands often, is the best way to protect yourself from group A strep infections. Handwashing, especially after coughing and sneezing, and before and after caring for a sick person, will help prevent the spread of germs. Avoid sharing food, beverages, eating utensils or cigarettes. Daycare centers should clean toys daily with an approved disinfectant and discourage use of play food. Keep any cuts or scrapes or other wounds clean and watch for signs of infection and see a healthcare provider if they get red or swollen or you develop a fever. You can also see a healthcare provider if you have a painful sore throat.