

Group A Streptococcus (GAS) - Factsheet

What is GAS?

There is a group of bacteria called group A *Streptococcus* (also called group A strep), which can cause many different bacterial infections such as impetigo, strep throat, scarlet fever, streptococcus toxic shock syndrome (STSS), necrotizing fasciitis, pneumonia, bacteremia in association with or without skin infection, and many other serious and/or life-threatening diseases. GAS organisms are commonly found in the throat and on the skin of healthy people. Invasive GAS disease occurs when the bacteria invade normally sterile parts of the body.

What are the symptoms of GAS infections?

Symptoms depend on the presenting disease. Invasive GAS infections are thought to be the most common cause of tissue death, where tissue under the skin, or around the muscles, nerves, fat, and blood vessels, becomes inflamed and can be accompanied by fever. Non-invasive GAS infections can cause a swollen, red sore throat and tonsils, fever, headache, swollen lymph nodes in the neck, small blisters or red bumps, and possibly abdominal pain.

How is GAS spread?

GAS is spread person-to-person through direct contact with respiratory secretions, such as saliva, wound discharge, nasal secretions of infected or colonized persons, or through direct contact with skin lesions of infected persons.

How long are people with GAS contagious?

Non-invasive GAS infections are no longer contagious within 24 hours after initiation of appropriate antibiotics. Invasive GAS infections are generally not contagious, but untreated purulent GAS skin lesions may be contagious for weeks to months.

Who gets GAS?

Anyone can get an infection from GAS bacteria, but risk factors for invasive GAS include older age, cancer, heart disease, diabetes mellitus, HIV infection, drug use, and recent varicella infection.

What treatment is available for people with GAS?

Prompt treatment is key. A healthcare provider will usually prescribe antibiotics, but invasive cases may require further treatment.

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

People who are sick should stay home until they feel well enough to return and have not had a fever for 24 hours. People with invasive infections often will need hospital care.

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

- Practice good hygiene and wash your hands often.
- Keep any cuts, scrapes, or other wounds clean' watch for signs of infection around these areas if present and see a healthcare provider if they become red, swollen, or you develop a fever.
- See a healthcare provider if you have a painful sore throat.
- Daycare centers should clean toys daily with an approved disinfectant and discourage use of play food.