

STREP THROAT & SCARLET FEVER

Strep throat and scarlet fever (strep throat with a rash) are caused by the bacteria called Group A Streptococcus. This germ is spread by contact with secretions from the mouth and nose of infected persons. The incubation period is usually between two and five days. Children are contagious (able to spread the disease) until twenty-four hours after antibiotic treatment is begun.

Signs and symptoms include sore throat, fever, swollen glands below the jaw and in the neck, and pus on the tonsils. Sometimes there is the strawberry tongue and fine, red, sand-paper like rash of scarlet fever. Headache, bad breath, vomiting, and stomach pain may also occur. Grandma may remember times when kids with scarlet fever were quarantined (isolated from other people), but we now know that this is not necessary beyond 24 hours after having started the antibiotic.

If you suspect strep throat, keep your child at home and contact us for an appointment. We will then perform a strep test to determine whether the streptococcal bacteria is present. Children exposed to strep throat usually do not require a strep test unless they develop symptoms. Our office performs a high quality, rapid strep test that is more sensitive than traditional throat cultures.

If the diagnosis is strep throat, your child will be given a prescription for an antibiotic to be taken by mouth. To prevent more serious disease (such as rheumatic fever), your child must take this medication as prescribed, even if the symptoms are gone and your child is feeling well. This time is usually for a full ten days, but may be only five days with some newer antibiotics.

If your child is bothered by the rash of scarlet fever, you can use some Benadryl to decrease the itch, and Aloe Vera cream to decrease the peeling. Don't be too surprised to see the skin of the hands and feet peel impressively in a week or two.

We don't consider taking out a child's tonsils much anymore unless the cases of strep throat your child has are severe, more frequent than three episodes in a three month period, and are associated with complications. Children who've had their tonsils removed can still get just as many sore throats and cases of strep as before they had the tonsils out.