

### **What is strep throat?**

Strep throat is an inflamed (red and swollen) throat caused by infection with bacteria called Streptococci. It is diagnosed with a Strep test or a rapid strep test at the healthcare provider's office.

With antibiotic treatment the fever and much of the sore throat are usually gone within 24 hours. It is important to treat strep throat to prevent some rare but serious complications such as rheumatic fever (a disease that affects the heart) or glomerulonephritis (a disease that affects the kidneys).

### **How can I take care of my child?**

#### **Antibiotics**

- Your child needs the antibiotic prescribed by your healthcare provider.
- Try not to forget any of the doses. If the medicine is a liquid, store the antibiotic in the refrigerator and use a measuring spoon to be sure that you give the right amount. Your child should take the medicine until all the pills are gone or the bottle is empty. Even though your child will feel better in a few days, give the antibiotic for 10 days to keep the strep throat from flaring up again.
- A long-acting penicillin (Bicillin) injection can be given if your child will not take oral medicines or if it will be impossible for you to give the medicine regularly. (Note: If given correctly, the oral antibiotic works just as rapidly and effectively as a shot.)

#### **Fever and pain relief**

- Children over age 1 can sip warm chicken broth or apple juice. Children over age 6 can suck on hard candy (butterscotch seems to be a soothing flavor) or lollipops. Give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) for throat pain or fever over 102°F (38.9°C).
- If the air in your home is dry, use a humidifier.

#### **Diet**

- A sore throat can make some foods hard to swallow. Provide your child with a diet of soft foods for a few days if he prefers it. Make sure your child drinks plenty of liquid to keep the throat moist.

#### **Contagiousness**

- Your child is no longer contagious after he has taken the antibiotic for 24 hours. Therefore, your child can return to school after one day if he is feeling better and the fever is gone. Hand washing is the best way to prevent strep throat.

### **Strep tests for the family**

- Strep throat can spread to others in the family. Any child or adult who lives in your home and has a fever, sore throat, runny nose, headache, vomiting, or sores; doesn't want to eat; or develops these symptoms in the next 5 days should be brought in for a Strep test. In most homes only the people who are sick need Strep tests. (In families where relatives have had rheumatic fever or frequent strep infections, everyone should have a Strep test.) Your provider will call you if any of the cultures are positive for strep.

#### **Recurrent strep throat and repeat Strep tests**

- Usually repeat Strep tests are not necessary if your child takes all of the antibiotic. However, about 10% of children with strep throat don't respond to initial antibiotic treatment. Therefore, if your child continues to have a sore throat or mild fever after treatment is completed, return for a second Strep test. If it is positive, your child will be given a different antibiotic.

### **When should I call my child's healthcare provider?**

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- Your child starts drooling or has great trouble swallowing.

- Your child is acting very sick.

Call during office hours if:

- The fever lasts over 48 hours after your child starts taking an antibiotic.
- You have other questions or concerns.

### **What is a strep test?**

- A strep test looks for infection caused by bacteria called group A streptococcus.

### **Why is this test done?**

A strep test is done to find out if strep bacteria are causing a sore throat. If the test finds strep bacteria, your child's healthcare provider will probably prescribe antibiotics. Treatment with antibiotics may help your child feel better sooner than if your child does not have treatment. More importantly, it also lowers the chance of more serious problems that can be caused by strep, such as heart problems. Most other common causes of sore throat do not usually need treatment with antibiotics.

### **How do I prepare my child for this test?**

It is best not to take any antibiotics before a check for strep. Tell the healthcare provider if your child took antibiotics during the 3 days before the test.

### **How is the test done?**

The strep test may be done in 2 ways: a rapid strep test or a throat culture. For either test your healthcare provider gets a sample by rubbing a cotton swab against a tonsil in the back of the throat. The sample is sent to a lab.

- If the rapid strep test is done, the lab looks for a substance made by strep bacteria in the throat sample. If the test finds this substance, the result is positive and it means that strep bacteria were in the sample. The lab will have this result in 1 hour or less.
- If a throat culture is done, the lab checks for growth of bacteria from the sample. This test may be done to check the results of a rapid strep test. You can usually get these results in 24 to 48 hours.

Ask your healthcare provider when and how you will get the result of the test.

### **What does the test result mean?**

Usually, a positive strep test result means that your child has strep, and a negative result means that your child does not have strep throat.

Although these tests are very precise, they are not perfect. Cultures are more accurate and reliable than rapid tests. A culture may be done even though a rapid test is negative to make sure your child does not have a strep infection. The strep culture test also provides more information than the rapid strep test. In addition to showing whether your child has strep throat, it may show the specific kind (strain) of strep bacteria infecting the throat. It can help your healthcare provider know which antibiotic will be most effective in treating the infection. For this reason, your provider may not prescribe an antibiotic until the results of a culture test are back.

### **What if the test result is not normal?**

If the test result is positive, ask your provider:

- what antibiotic he or she is prescribing.
- if more tests are needed.