

Group A Streptococcus (GAS)

What is Group A Streptococcus?

Group A Streptococcus is a type of bacteria that is commonly found on the skin and in the throat and nose. Streptococcus (Strep) is the cause of many illnesses such as throat and skin infections, which are usually mild. Strep organisms may also be present without causing any symptoms or illnesses at all. When Strep stays in the throat or on the skin, it is called a “non-invasive” infection. Non-invasive infections include diseases such as strep throat, scarlet fever, and impetigo. When Strep infects a part of the body that is normally sterile such as the bloodstream or spinal fluid, it is called a “invasive” infection, which can be severe and sometimes life-threatening. Examples of invasive infections include meningitis (inflammation of the meninges, the membrane that surrounds the brain and spinal cord), bacteremia (bacteria in the blood), toxic shock syndrome (a complex illness with symptoms of sudden fever, chills, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle aches and rash, which can quickly lead to severe illness and sometimes death), and necrotizing fasciitis (a quickly spreading infection causing tissue destruction that requires aggressive treatment to prevent serious complications, also known as flesh-eating bacteria). Invasive Group A Streptococcus is a reportable disease in Oklahoma and labs routinely send in positive results as they are identified.

How is GAS spread?

Strep can be spread by direct contact with secretions from the nose and throat of infected persons or by contact with drainage from skin infections.

How can I prevent the spread of GAS?

You can prevent Strep infections by thorough and frequent hand washing, especially after contact with respiratory secretions or items that may be contaminated with them. When your hands are not visibly dirty, and you are not near a sink, use an alcohol-based hand gel instead. When you cough or sneeze, cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or with your elbow before washing your hands immediately after.

Another way to prevent Strep infections is to protect yourself if you have any broken skin. Skin that has been injured or is otherwise not intact is susceptible to infection unless it is kept clean and covered while healing. If signs of skin infection occur such as redness, swelling and drainage, contact your healthcare provider. Wound drainage can carry Strep infections, so it is important to keep any wound drainage contained with a bandage, and to change any bandages that become soaked as soon as possible. Good hand washing after changing a bandage is important and should be done immediately after you throw the used bandages into the trash.

Persons who have been diagnosed with Strep throat should stay home from daycare, school, or work until at least 12 hours after starting antibiotic treatment and have been fever free for 24 hours without the use of fever-reducing medication. It is important to take any antibiotics exactly as prescribed, and to finish all the prescription.