



# Sarpy/Cass Department of Health & Wellness

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## FACT SHEET

### Group A Streptococcal (GAS) Disease

Group A streptococcus is a bacterium often found in the throat and on the skin. People may carry group A streptococci in the throat or on the skin and have no symptoms of illness. Most GAS infections are relatively mild illnesses such as "strep throat," or impetigo. On rare occasions, these bacteria can cause other severe and even life-threatening diseases

**Cause:** *Streptococcus pyogenes* or group A streptococcus.

**Symptoms:** Infection with GAS can result in a range of symptoms:

- No illness
- Mild illness ( strep throat, or a skin infection such as impetigo)
- Severe illness (necrotizing faciitis-destroys muscle, fat and skin tissue: streptococcal toxic shock syndrome-causes blood pressure to drop rapidly and kidney, liver and lungs to fail.)

**Spread:** These bacteria are spread through direct contact with mucus from the nose or throat of persons who are infected or through contact with infected wounds or sores on the skin. Ill persons, such as those who have strep throat or skin infections, are most likely to spread the infection. Persons who carry the bacteria but have no symptoms are much less contagious. Treating an infected person with an antibiotic for 24 hours or longer generally eliminates their ability to spread the bacteria. However, it is important to complete the entire course of antibiotics as prescribed. It is not likely that household items like plates, cups, or toys spread these bacteria.

**Incubation:** Usually 1-3 days.

**Contagious Period:** In untreated, uncomplicated cases, 10-21days; in untreated conditions with purulent discharges, weeks or months. With adequate penicillin therapy, transmissibility generally is terminated within 24 hours. Patients with untreated streptococcal pharyngitis may carry the organism in the pharynx for weeks or months.

**Precautions:** Good hygiene especially hand washing after coughing, sneezing, preparing foods or eating, do not share toilet articles.

**Diagnosis and Treatment:** Group A Streptococcus infections can be treated with many different antibiotics. Early treatment may reduce the risk of death from invasive group A streptococcal disease. However, even the best medical care does not prevent death in every case. For those with very severe illness, supportive care in an intensive care unit may be needed. For persons with necrotizing fasciitis, surgery often is needed to remove damaged tissue.

**Prevention:**

The spread of all types of Group A Streptococcus infection can be reduced by good hand washing, especially after coughing and sneezing and before preparing foods or eating. Persons with sore throats should be seen by a doctor who can perform tests to find out whether the illness is strep throat. If the test result shows strep throat, the person should stay home from work, school, or day care until 24 hours after taking an antibiotic. All wounds should be kept clean and watched for possible signs of infection such as redness, swelling, drainage, and pain at the wound site. A person with signs of an infected wound, especially if fever occurs, should seek medical care. It is not necessary for all persons exposed to someone with an invasive group A strep infection (i.e. necrotizing fasciitis or strep toxic shock syndrome) to receive antibiotic therapy to prevent infection. However, in certain circumstances, antibiotic therapy may be appropriate.