

What is group A *Streptococcus*?

Group A *Streptococcus* (GAS) or "strep" is a bacteria often found in the throat and on the skin. Strep can be in your body and not cause any illness. It may also cause illnesses that range from mild to severe and even life threatening.

Most strep infections are mild illnesses, such as "strep throat" or impetigo. Sometimes strep can reach parts of the body where bacteria are not usually found, such as the blood, deep muscle and fat tissue, or the lungs, and can cause serious infections.

How is strep spread?

Strep bacteria are spread by direct contact with drainage from the nose or throat of infected persons or by contact with infected wounds or sores on the skin.

Why do serious strep infections occur?

Serious strep infections happen when the bacteria get past the body's defenses. This may occur when a person has sores or other breaks in the skin that let the bacteria get into the tissue.

Who is most at risk of getting serious strep infections?

Few people who come in contact with strep will get serious illness. Some will have a throat or skin infection. Most will have no symptoms at all. Although healthy people can get serious strep illness, those with cancer, diabetes, and kidney disease needing dialysis, and those who take certain medicine are at higher risk. Breaks in the skin, like cuts, wounds, or chickenpox lesions may provide a way for the bacteria to get into the body.

How are strep infections treated?

Strep infections can be treated with many different antibiotics. It is always important to complete the full course of antibiotics as ordered by your healthcare provider.

What can be done to help stop serious strep infections?

The spread of strep is less likely when you wash hands, after coughing and sneezing, before fixing foods and before eating. Persons with a sore throat should be seen by a healthcare provider. A lab test can say if it is strep throat. If it is, the person should stay home from work, school, or child care until 24 hours after starting antibiotics. All sores should be kept clean. If a sore gets red or puffy, drains pus or hurts, see a healthcare provider.