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# Group A Streptococcus (GAS)

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## **What is Group A Streptococcus (GAS)?**

- A bacteria often found in the throat and on the skin.
- Some people carry this bacteria but have no illness.
- It can cause infections, such as strep throat, impetigo or scarlet fever.
- Occasionally, GAS may invade the blood, muscle, and fat tissue (places where bacteria are not normally found). These infections are called “invasive”.
- Less severe invasive GAS infections include erysipelas and cellulitis.
- More severe invasive GAS infections include Streptococcal toxic shock syndrome (STSS) or necrotizing fasciitis (also known as “flesh eating disease”). These infections can be life threatening.

## **How does a person get GAS?**

- The bacteria is spread by:
  - direct contact with mucous or saliva from the nose or throat of an infected person, or
  - contact with infected wounds or sores on the skin.
- Ill people are most contagious.
- Persons who carry the bacteria but have no symptoms are much less contagious.
- It is unlikely that household items like plates, cups or toys will spread GAS.

## **What are the signs and symptoms?**

- A person may show no symptoms.
- Symptoms may vary depending on the kind of infection.

## **Strep throat**

- red and painful sore throat, white patches on tonsils; swollen lymph nodes, fever and headache
- nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain (more common in children)

## **Impetigo**

- red or pimple-like sores surrounded by reddened skin
- lesions fill with pus, break open after a few days and form a thick crust
- may be anywhere on the body, but mostly on the face, arms, and legs
- itching is common

## **Cellulitis**

- fever, chills, swollen glands, red, painful, tender skin
- skin may blister and scab over

## **Erysipelas**

- a fiery red rash with raised borders
- may appear on arms, legs or face
- skin may be hot, red and have sharply defined raised areas
- the infection may come back, causing chronic swelling of the legs and arms

## **Scarlet fever:**

- symptoms similar to strep throat
- a tiny, red, pin point rash that has a rough texture (like sandpaper), appearing on the sides and abdomen

### ***Necrotizing fasciitis***

- fever
- severe pain
- rapid spread of swelling and redness at the wound site

### ***Toxic Shock Syndrome***

- fever, dizziness, confusion, abdominal pain
- flat red rash over large areas of the body.

### ***How is GAS treated?***

- Antibiotics may be prescribed.
- A specimen, such as a swab or blood test, may be required to discover what kind of bacteria is causing the infection.
- After taking antibiotics for 24 hours you are no longer infectious.
- Early treatment can reduce the risk of serious complications from invasive disease.
- With necrotizing fasciitis, surgery may be needed to remove damaged tissue.

### ***How is GAS prevented?***

- Always wash hands thoroughly after coughing or sneezing.
- Do not attend daycare, school or workplace, until 24 hours after antibiotics have been started.
- Keep wounds clean and watch 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 immediate medical care.
- Specific antibiotics may be recommended for close contacts (household or those who have shared nose /throat secretions of an infected person). Public Health will assess and follow-up as needed. These contacts need to watch for any symptoms of GAS for 30 days following any exposure.

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For more information contact your doctor or Population and Public Health at  
**306-655-4612.**

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