



INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Invasive Group A Streptococcus (GAS) Patient Information

What is *Group A Streptococcus (GAS)*?

GAS is a germ (bacteria) that can be found in the nose, throat, and/or on the skin of healthy people. Some people carry the germ all the time, but it doesn't necessarily cause an infection or illness. However for others, the germ can cause mild to serious disease.

How does *Group A Streptococcus* spread?

These germs spread through contact with secretions from the nose or throat of people who are infected. This might happen through kissing or mouth to mouth resuscitation. Contamination can also occur when infected droplets are spread from an infected person's coughs or sneezes or if there is contact with infected wounds. People who are ill and have symptoms of GAS infection are the most likely to spread it to others. People who carry the germ without signs and symptoms of illness are not very contagious. Treating an infected person with an antibiotic for 24 hours or longer usually stops the ability of the germ to spread.

How does *Group A Streptococcus* make people sick?

Most people who become ill from GAS will have common infections such as sore throat (strep throat), tonsillitis or skin infections. Cellulitis (swollen, warm, red and painful area) is sometimes due to GAS entering the body through a cut or opening in the skin.

GAS is sometimes found in unusual locations such as blood, fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord, or in the lining of muscles and joints. These infections can be severe and possibly lead to death. In Ontario about 2-3 people out of 100,000 have severe GAS infection each year whereas thousands of people have infections such as strep throat.

What are the signs and symptoms of severe *Group A Streptococcus*?

Symptoms of disease are varied. Fever is usually present. Early signs of flesh eating disease and muscle infection include pain, swelling and redness of the skin at wound site. Early signs of toxic shock syndrome, include a feeling of being unwell (much like "flu" symptoms), dizziness, confusion, sometimes a flat red rash on the body, and sudden onset of severe pain. Meningitis symptoms include fever, severe pain on movement of the neck, nausea, and /or vomiting.

How do I find out that I have *Group A Streptococcus*?

The Doctor will collect a sample of tissue or fluid from the affected area and send it to the lab to identify if GAS is present.

How is *Group A Streptococcus* treated?

Mild infections are treated with antibiotics taken by mouth. Generally, taking antibiotics for at least 24 hours prevents the possibility of spreading the germ to others. More serious infections may require antibiotics by IV (intravenous). Occasionally, serious infections may also need surgery.

Who is at risk of getting *Group A Streptococcus*?

Very few healthy people who come into contact with GAS germs develop serious disease. Those at risk include the elderly, people with chronic diseases such as HIV, cancer, diabetes as well as dialysis patients. People in very close contact of the infected person are at increased risk. This includes those who live in the same house, share a bed or bedroom, have direct contact with secretions (e.g. open mouth kissing) or open sores. School classmates, work colleagues and social or sports contacts are not usually considered to be close contacts.

What can be done to prevent *Group A Streptococcus*?

Good personal hygiene including frequent hand washing and bathing. Cover your cough or sneezes in a tissue or into your sleeve. Clean and cover all wounds and cuts. Seek medical attention if a cut becomes infected.

What does the Hospital do to prevent the spread of *Group A Streptococcus*?

Patients with GAS are managed on droplet and contact precautions until they have received 24 hours of antibiotics and all wound drainage is contained. Public Health is notified of all invasive GAS so they can investigate and educate close contacts in the community.

What special precautions are needed for *Group A Streptococcus* at home?

The disease is not considered contagious by the time of discharge home.

What do I need to know prior to discharge?

You and your family will be contacted by Public Health.

If you have questions about the information in this document, contact Queensway Carleton Hospital's Infection Prevention and Control at 613-721-2000, ext. 3777.