

Strep Throat

signs and symptoms, treatment, transmission

The signs and [symptoms](#) of strep throat are red, sore throat with white or yellow patches on [tonsils](#), swollen [lymph nodes](#) in the neck, [fever](#) over 101 Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius), [headache](#), extreme shaking/shivering, and cold sweats. Many patients also have difficulty swallowing. [Nausea](#), [vomiting](#), and [abdominal pain](#) are more common in children. [Cough](#) is infrequent in older patients, but younger children may experience cold-like symptoms including stuffy noses and sneezing similar to many viral infections. The onset of a rash may be a sign of [scarlet fever](#).

Transmission

The illness is caused by the [bacterium](#) *Streptococcus pyogenes* and is spread by direct, close contact with patients via respiratory droplets ([coughing](#) or [sneezing](#)). Casual contact rarely results in transmission. Rarely, contaminated food, especially [milk](#) and [milk products](#), can result in [outbreaks](#). Untreated patients are most infectious for 2-3 weeks after onset of infection. The [incubation period](#), the period after exposure and before symptoms show up, is difficult to establish as some people don't become symptomatic. However, it is thought to be about 1 week.

Diagnosis

The throat of the patient is swabbed for culture or for a rapid strep test (5 to 10 min) which can be done in the doctor's office. A rapid test tests for the presence of typical bacterial [antigens](#) in the swab, which are detected by specific [antibodies](#) provided in the kit. If the rapid test is negative (that is, normal), a follow-up culture (which takes 24 to 48 hours) may be performed. A negative culture suggests a [viral](#) infection, in which case [antibiotic](#) treatment should be withheld or discontinued.

Return to School

Children with strep infections may return to school after taking the medicine for **at least 24 hours and the fever has been gone for 24 hours**.

Prevent Spread

1. Wash your hands and your child's hands after wiping noses and before eating or preparing food.
2. Wash dishes in hot, soapy water or a dishwasher.
3. Do not allow the sharing of food or allow children to share cups, spoons, or toys that are put into the mouth.