

STREP THROAT

There are many causes of sore throats and most of these are viral. There is only one type of sore throat that needs treatment with an antibiotic and this is strep throat. There are only two ways to diagnose strep throat. One is with a positive throat test, and the other is if your child is diagnosed by a doctor as having scarlet fever (strep throat with a sandpaper, red rash). Your child should never be placed on antibiotics for a sore throat unless they have a positive throat test or scarlet fever.

Now, here is the confusing part. **Many people have strep bacteria living in their throat (as many as 30% of healthy kids are colonized with strep). This means that even if your child has a positive strep test, they do not need an antibiotic.** How do you know? There are certain signs of viral illnesses, and if your child has these they do not need a strep test. A positive strep test with signs of a viral illness just means the bacteria always lives in your child's throat and does not cause them any harm. The following are signs of viral illnesses: runny nose, cough, hoarseness, pink eye, diarrhea, or ulcers in the mouth. In addition, *The Red Book*, which is the foremost authority on infectious disease, states that children under three years old should not be tested or treated for strep throat because they are not at risk for rheumatic fever.

In summary, here are the rules to follow:

If your child *has these symptoms*:

- A sore throat
- Fever
- Headache
- Stomachache

Your child may have strep throat and needs to be checked.

But, if your child *has the following symptoms, they do not have strep* (even with all of the above):

- Younger than 3
- Runny nose
- Cough
- Hoarseness
- Pink eye
- Diarrhea
- Ulcers in the mouth

Don't let anyone test your child or give them an antibiotic if one is not needed.

You have Strep Throat, Now What...

Now that you have the diagnosis of strep here are some “need to know” facts.

1. You need to take all of the antibiotic (prescription) given.

The problem with strep is that if it is not treated, this infection can hurt your heart or kidneys. To protect your heart and kidneys you need to follow the directions and take all of the prescribed medication.

2. You are still contagious until 24 hours after the first dose of the prescribed antibiotic.

You can return to school and activities after being on the antibiotics for 24 hours.

3. You need a new toothbrush and toothpaste.

Please make this change after that 24-hour mark noted in #2 but while you are still on the antibiotic. This is to avoid getting strep again from your old supplies. NEVER share toothpaste – this can make you and your family at risk for strep and other infections too.

4. Anyone around you with fever, headache, sore throat, tummy ache or rash -- needs to be seen and evaluated as you have exposed them to strep. (incubation period is usually 3-4 days)