

Group A Streptococcal Infection

Information for patients

This leaflet can be made available in other formats including large print, CD and Braille and in languages other than English, upon request.

This leaflet tells you about Group A Streptococcal infection, sometimes called GAS or Group A Strep.

What is Group A Streptococcus?

Group A Streptococcus is the name given to a type of bacteria sometimes found in the throat or on the skin. Group A Streptococcus usually causes mild illness like sore throats and skin infections. Rarely these bacteria can cause severe and life threatening illness called invasive Group A Streptococcal disease.

How could I catch Group A Streptococcus?

Many people carry Group A Strep harmlessly and do not develop illness. It can be passed from person to person by close contact such as kissing or skin contact. Most people who come into contact with Group A Strep remain well and symptom free, some get mild throat or skin infections.

Contracting invasive disease from a relative or household member is very rare. You can reduce the risk of picking up Group A Strep by always washing your hands thoroughly. Pregnant women or those having gynaecology treatments are advised to wash their hands before and after going to the toilet. It is also important to dispose of tissues after use and to wash your hands when you have a cough or cold.

What are the symptoms?

Group A Strep can cause throat infection, scarlet fever or skin infections such as cellulitis or impetigo. These infections are usually treated with antibiotics. Very rarely it can cause severe illness when the bacteria get into parts of the body that are usually free from bacteria such as the lungs, blood or muscles. This is called invasive Group A Streptococcal disease.

Invasive disease happens when the bacteria get past your body's immune defences. This can happen when you are already ill or are on treatments, such as some cancer treatments, that affect your immune system. Two of the most severe types of invasive disease are necrotising fasciitis and toxic shock syndrome.

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Am I at any increased risk of invasive disease?

Those at an increased risk of invasive Group A Streptococcal disease include people who:

- are in close contact with someone who has the disease
- are over the age of 65
- are diabetic, have heart disease or cancer
- have recently had chickenpox
- have HIV
- use some steroids or other intravenous drugs.

What are the signs of invasive disease?

The symptoms can include:

- fever (a high temperature above 38°C (100.4°F))
- severe muscle aches
- localised muscle tenderness
- redness at the site of a wound.

What should I do if I have symptoms of invasive disease?

You should contact your GP or get medical advice straight away if you think you have any of the signs and symptoms of invasive disease. Tell your doctor if you have been in contact with someone who has had Group A Strep recently. Your GP will most likely ask you to come into the surgery to be examined.

How will I be cared for if I have invasive Group A Streptococcal disease?

Group A Strep disease can be treated with antibiotics. In severe cases surgery (an operation) may be needed. If you are in hospital you will most likely be looked after in a room on your own and the staff caring for you will wear aprons and gloves and, in some cases, a face mask. Your visitors will be asked to wear aprons and gloves when they visit and to wash their hands before and after coming into your room. Your doctor will advise you if you need to continue to take antibiotics once you go home.

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Contact numbers

If you have any questions or worries please talk to one of your doctors or nurses. They can arrange for you to speak with an infection prevention and control nurse.

University Hospital of North Tees

Infection Prevention and Control Department

telephone: 01642 383280

Monday - Friday, 8.30am – 4.30pm

NHS Choices

telephone: 111 (when it is less urgent than 999)

Calls to this number are free from landlines and mobile phones or via the website at www.nhs.uk

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This leaflet has been produced in partnership with patients and carers. All patient leaflets are regularly reviewed, and any suggestions you have as to how it may be improved are extremely valuable. Please write to the Quality Assurance Team, University Hospital of North Tees or email: patientinformation@nth.nhs.uk

Comments, Concerns, Compliments or Complaints

We are continually trying to improve the services we provide.

We want to know what we're doing well or if there's anything which we can improve, that's why the Patient Experience Team is here to help.

Our Patient Experience Team is here to try to resolve your concerns as quickly as possible. If you would like to contact or request a copy of our PET leaflet, please contact:

telephone: 01642 624719
Monday – Friday, 9.00 am – 4.00 pm
Messages can be left on the answering machine and will be picked up throughout the day.

freephone: 0800 092 0084
Mobile: (can use text): 0779 506 1883
Email: patientexperience@nth.nhs.uk

Out of hours if you wish to speak to a senior member of Trust staff, please contact the hospital switchboard who will bleep the appropriate person.

telephone: 01642 617617
24 hours a day, 7 days a week

The Patient Experience Team is available to discuss your concerns in person Monday – Friday, 1.30 pm – 4.30 pm. The office is based on the ground floor at the University Hospital of North Tees.

Data Protection and use of patient information

The Trust has developed a Data Protection Policy in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1988 and the Freedom of Information Act 2000. All of our staff respect this policy and confidentiality is adhered to at all times. If you require further information please contact the Information Governance Team.

telephone: 01642 833551 or email: information.governance@nth.nhs.uk

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