

# Group A streptococcus (GAS)

## What is it?

- Group A streptococci (GAS) are germs commonly found in the throat and on the skin that can cause a wide range of infections.
- GAS infections are often mild illnesses such as strep throat (Strep throat is a bacterial infection that can make your throat feel sore and scratchy) and impetigo (a common and highly contagious skin infection that usually appears as red sores on the face).
- Sometimes these germs can cause serious, even life threatening diseases if they move to areas besides the throat and skin. Then they are called invasive GAS (iGAS). Two of the most severe forms of iGAS are streptococcal toxic shock syndrome (STSS) and necrotizing fasciitis also known as the flesh eating disease.

## How is it spread?

GAS germs can be spread by being in close contact with someone who is sick with GAS. The GAS germs can spread:

- When a sick person coughs or sneezes
- Through contact with the open wounds or skin lesions
- Through sharing needles/drug equipment
- Through open-mouth kissing or providing mouth to mouth resuscitation to a sick person

## What are the symptoms?

People may carry the germs in their throat or on the skin and have no symptoms of illness. Symptoms usually start 1-3 days after contact with the germs, but it may take up to 10 days for symptoms to appear, depending on the site and type of GAS infection.

- GAS of the throat includes symptoms of fever, sore throat, tender neck glands, swollen tonsils, and ear infections may also develop
- GAS of the blood includes symptoms of fever, chills, headache, generally unwell feeling, rapid breathing and increased heart rate.
- STSS includes symptoms of fever, sudden drop in blood pressure and possible organ failure
- Flesh eating disease includes symptoms of fever, chills, fatigue, vomiting and diarrhea. It can cause rapid severe pain, redness and swelling around a

wound and destruction of muscles, fat and skin tissue.

## How is it treated?

- GAS can be treated with antibiotics. Very severe illness may need supportive care and/or hospitalization.
- Individuals with flesh eating disease may need surgery to remove damage and stop the spread of the disease.

## How is it prevented?

- Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or a shirt sleeve.
- Repeated hand washing especially after coughing and sneezing, and before preparing or eating foods.
- Wounds should be kept clean and look for signs of infection such as redness, swelling, pain and drainage. A person with signs of infection should get medical attention.

## Should I go to childcare, school or work?

- If you are diagnosed with strep throat you should stay home from childcare, school or work for at least 24 hours after taking antibiotics.

For further information, please contact the Communicable Disease Control Program staff at 705-474-1400 or 1-800-563-2808, ext 5229.

## References

Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (2018). *Group A Streptococcal (GAS) Disease Frequently Asked Questions*. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/groupAstrep/about/faqs.html>.

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Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Public Health Branch. (2014a). *Appendix A: Group A Streptococcal Disease, invasive (iGAS)*. Retrieved from: [http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph\\_standards/docs/gas\\_chapter.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/gas_chapter.pdf).

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