

Patient information

Group A Streptococcus (GAS)

Infection Prevention and Control Team

What is Group A Streptococcus (GAS)?

Group A Streptococci are a type of bacteria often found in the throat and on the skin. Many people carry the bacteria without having any symptoms of illness. This is known as being colonised.

How is it spread?

The bacteria are spread through direct contact with mucous from the nose or throat of people who are infected. Streptococci live in throats and on hands for long enough to allow easy spread between people through sneezing, kissing and skin contact. It may also be acquired from contact with the discharge from affected wounds.

What diseases does it cause?

Most GAS infections are relatively mild. Group A Streptococci can produce skin infections such as impetigo and cellulitis, and mild disease such as tonsillitis or pharyngitis.

It may rarely cause more serious disease such as necrotising fasciitis.

What treatment can be given?

The treatment is an antibiotic, usually Penicillin (Erythromycin if you are allergic to penicillin) for ten days.

If the infection is treated with antibiotics the affected person can lose their ability to spread the disease after 24 hours of the antibiotic course. However, it is important to continue the course of antibiotics for the full ten days.

Any wounds infected with the Streptococcus bacteria should be covered with a dressing.

What can be done to prevent the spread?

Good hand washing especially after coughing and sneezing will help to prevent its spread.

In hospital it may be necessary for you to be placed in a single room until you have had the correct antibiotics for at least 24 hours.

Healthcare staff should wear gloves and aprons while caring for you during this period to prevent the spread of the bacteria.

What is invasive Group A Streptococcal disease (iGAS)?

Sometimes a GAS infection may occur when bacteria get into parts of the body where the bacteria are not normally found, such as the blood, muscle, or the lungs.

This may occur when a person has wounds or other breaks in the skin that allow the bacteria to get into the tissues, or when the person's ability to fight the infection is reduced, because of an illness that affects the immune system.

These infections are termed invasive Group A Streptococcal (iGAS) disease.

Am I at risk of getting invasive Group A streptococcal disease from close contact with a relative or household contact?

Most people who come into contact with GAS remain well and symptom-free or develop mild throat or skin infections.

Healthy people can get invasive GAS disease from a relative or a member of their household, but it is very rare.

What do I need to be aware of?

If your family develop any of these symptoms (see below), contact your GP.

Early signs and symptoms of invasive group A streptococcal disease include:

- High fever.
- Severe muscle aches.
- Localised muscle tenderness.
- Redness at the site of a wound.

Can I have visitors?

Yes, you can. Visitors should clean their hands before and after visiting you.

If your family do experience any symptoms, you should seek medical advice. If there are several cases of GAS/iGAS within the family then community health will be in contact to provide support and information.

Laundry

Patients' laundry can be taken home and washed as normal. Remember to wash your hands after handling soiled linen.

What should I do if I am discharged home?

Ensure that you complete your current course of antibiotic treatment if advised by the hospital.

No special measures are required with household cleaning and laundry.

Once you are discharged home there is no reason why you should not continue to join in any activity that you enjoyed before coming into hospital.

Feedback

Your feedback is important to us and helps us influence care in the future.

Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further information

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