



Group A Streptococcal Infection

What is Group A Streptococcal (GAS) infection?

Group A Streptococcus (GAS) are bacteria commonly found in the throat and on the skin. People may carry these bacteria and have no symptoms of illness. When they do cause illness, the resulting disease will occur in one of 2 forms:

- invasive GAS infection; or
- non-invasive GAS infection.

What is the difference between invasive and non-invasive GAS?

Common non-invasive GAS infections include strep throat, scarlet fever, impetigo, and ear infections. These infections are less severe and more contagious than invasive GAS infections.

Invasive GAS disease may occur when bacteria get into parts of the body where bacteria usually are not found, such as the blood, muscle, or the lungs. Two of the most severe, but least common, forms of invasive GAS disease are necrotizing fasciitis and streptococcal toxic shock syndrome. Necrotizing fasciitis (commonly known as “flesh-eating disease”) is a rapidly spreading disease which destroys muscles, fat and skin tissue. Streptococcal toxic shock syndrome results in a rapid drop in blood pressure and organ failure (i.e. kidneys, liver, lungs and brain).

What are the symptoms of non-invasive and invasive GAS?

Early signs of non-invasive GAS infection may include sore throat, fever, rash or a skin infection that is red, swollen, warm and tender to the touch.

If you develop symptoms see a doctor immediately. Your doctor may ask for a blood test or take a swab of the infected area to determine if you are infected with GAS.

Early signs of necrotizing fasciitis include fever, severe pain, swelling and redness of the affected area. Early signs of Streptococcal toxic shock syndrome may include low blood pressure and shock, dizziness, confusion, red rash that is spread out, nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain. The development of symptoms is rapid: therefore any person with these symptoms should seek medical assistance without delay.

How is GAS spread?

GAS is spread by direct contact with secretions from the nose or throat of an infected person, or through contact with an infected wound or sore on the skin. The incubation period for GAS, which is the time from when you are exposed to the bacteria until symptoms develop, is 1 to 3 days. Activities such as open mouth kissing (“french kissing”), mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, sexual intercourse and sharing needles may put you at greater risk of becoming infected. It is rarely spread by casual contact or by touching common surfaces or shared objects.

Who is most at risk of invasive GAS disease?

Very few of those who come in contact with the GAS bacteria will develop an invasive infection.

Those with chronic illnesses like cancer, diabetes and kidney disease are at a higher risk than generally healthy people. In addition, any breaks in the skin (e.g. cuts, wounds) or chicken pox may provide an opportunity for the bacteria to enter the body.

Can invasive GAS be treated?

Invasive GAS infections may be treated with common antibiotics. Sometimes hospitalization and surgery are also necessary.

How do I protect myself and others?

You can help stop the spread of GAS infections by practicing hand hygiene (with an alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water) after coughing or sneezing and before preparing foods or eating. Coughs and sneezes should be covered. If you have a sore throat, see your doctor to find out if you have strep throat. Persons with strep throat should avoid work or school until they have been on antibiotic treatment for 24 hours.


For more information call the Communicable Disease Team in the Barrie Office at (705) 721-7520 ext. 8809.



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Your Health Connection



All wounds should be kept clean. Watch for signs of infection such as redness, swelling, and pain at the wound site. If you think your wound is infected, see your doctor, especially if you have a fever.

Do contacts require follow up or treatment?

Family and friends of someone with invasive GAS will be contacted by the health unit. They will be advised to watch for signs and symptoms of GAS infection for 30 after last contact with the case and seek medical attention immediately if symptoms develop. Some close contacts of cases of necrotizing fasciitis or Streptococcal toxic shock syndrome may need to start antibiotics to prevent getting sick.

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