

Sore throat (including scarlet fever)

Description

Sore throats can be caused by either viruses or bacteria. Viral sore throats are not usually serious and disappear in a few days.

Most bacterial sore throats are caused by *Streptococcus*; this illness is also known as 'strep throat'. The effects of strep throat can range from mild to severe, and can have serious complications, including the following:

- Scarlet fever—a rare complication of strep throat. The disease starts with a fever, sore throat, swollen tonsils and neck glands, and loss of appetite. In 12–48 hours, a fine red rash appears on the trunk and limbs that looks like sunburn and feels like sandpaper. The tongue also becomes very red (known as 'strawberry tongue'). The rash lasts for 2–5 days. During recovery, the skin may peel off the fingers and toes.
- Quinsy—an abscess (collection of pus) next to a tonsil.
- Rheumatic fever—a rare complication in which fever, joint pain and a skin rash develop soon after a sore throat. Later, inflammation of the heart (rheumatic carditis), or shaking and unsteadiness (Sydenham's chorea or St Vitus' dance) may occur.
- Inflammation and reduced function of the kidney—a rare complication.

How does it spread?

Viral and bacterial throat infections are spread by airborne droplets (coughing and sneezing). They can also spread indirectly by contact with surfaces that have been contaminated by infectious airborne droplets (e.g. hands, tissues, toys, eating utensils).

Incubation period

The incubation period is usually 1–3 days.

Infectious period

People with a sore throat caused by a virus are infectious for as long as they are coughing or sneezing. This may last several days.

People with a bacterial sore throat can be infectious for 2–3 weeks after becoming ill if they are not treated. If they take antibiotics, they are infectious until 24 hours after starting treatment.

Exclusion period

Children with sore throats should stay at home until they are feeling well. Children with sore throats caused by bacteria should stay at home until they are feeling well and have had antibiotic treatment for at least 24 hours.

Responsibilities of educators and other staff

- For viral sore throats: advise the parent to keep the child home until they are feeling well.
- For bacterial sore throats: advise the parent to keep the child home until they are feeling well or have received antibiotic treatment for at least 24 hours.
- Ensure that educators and other staff with sore throats stay at home until they are feeling well.
- Make sure staff and children practise cough and sneeze etiquette and hand hygiene.
- Ensure that appropriate cleaning practices are being followed in the education and care service.

Responsibilities of parents

- Keep the child at home until they are feeling well or, if the sore throat is caused by bacteria, until they have been on antibiotic treatment for at least 24 hours.
- Encourage cough and sneeze etiquette and hand hygiene at home.

Controlling the spread of infection

- Observe the exclusion periods.
- Teach children about cough and sneeze etiquette.
 - Cough or sneeze into your inner elbow rather than your hand.
 - If you used a tissue to cover your nose or mouth when sneezing or coughing, put the tissue in the bin straight away.
 - Clean your hands.
- Ensure that staff practise cough and sneeze etiquette and effective hand hygiene.
- Ensure that appropriate cleaning practices are being followed.

Treatment

A bacterial sore throat can be treated with antibiotics prescribed by a doctor. Antibiotics are not appropriate for viral sore throats.