

Q. How can I tell if I have strep throat?

A. You really can't without a proper test. Most sore throat infections are caused by viruses. But sometimes the infection is caused by bacteria known as *Streptococcus*. That's where the term "strep throat" comes from.

How It Spreads

Strep throat is one of the most common causes of throat infections, especially among children and youth age 5 to 15. But anyone can get it. It is spread by contact with people who have the infection or contact with their secretions from coughing and sneezing. That's why strep throat can spread so easily in a household, classroom, or office.

Strep Throat Symptoms

At first, a strep throat infection caused by bacteria may seem the same as a viral infection. But as strep throat develops, the symptoms often get worse. Symptoms may include a fever, throat pain, red or white patches on the back of the throat, headache, swollen glands, lethargy, and a loss of appetite. And even though people search the Internet an estimated 1.2 million times a month for "strep throat symptoms," it is important to remember that a test is the only way to diagnose strep throat.



See Your Doctor for Treatment

If you think you might have strep throat, see your doctor. Left untreated, strep throat can lead to health problems like rheumatic fever, ear and sinus infections, meningitis, and pneumonia. After a physical exam, your doctor may perform a rapid strep test or throat culture to see if you have strep. If the test comes back positive, you should be treated with antibiotics.

These include penicillin, amoxicillin, or erythromycin if you're allergic to penicillin. Antibiotics are used to keep strep from recurring or causing complications. Your doctor will probably ask you to finish all of the pills – even if your symptoms resolve quickly. Resting and drinking plenty of fluids can also help your body fight off strep throat. And you should avoid contact with others for 48 hours after taking your first dose of antibiotics.

Preventing Strep Throat

The best way to prevent strep throat is...you guessed it... wash your hands with soap and warm water regularly. Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze. And, if possible, stay clear of others who have the infection until their treatment is well under way.

Sources:

*National Institutes of Health
Medical Clinics of North America
Mayo Clinic*

