

Invasive Group A Streptococcal (iGAS) Disease

Fact Sheet

What is Group A Streptococcus (GAS)?

Group A Streptococci (GAS) is a kind of germ (bacteria) that can live in the nose or throat, or on the skin. Many people can have GAS and do not feel sick. These people are called “carriers,” and they can still pass the germ to others. GAS can cause mild sickness, such as a sore (strep) throat, tonsillitis, ear infections, skin infections, or scarlet fever.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually start 1 to 3 days after you catch the germ. Sometimes the germ gets into other areas of the body (like the lungs, blood, or tissues). This is called “**invasive GAS**” (iGAS), and it can be very serious.

Symptoms can include:

- Sore throat
- Flu-like symptoms (fever, chills, sore muscles, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea)
- Headache
- Sudden fever
- Flesh-eating disease (necrotizing fasciitis): this is a fast-moving infection that affects tissues under the skin. Symptoms can include:
 - Flu-like symptoms (fever, chills, sore muscles, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea)
 - Blisters on the skin
 - A sore spot that is red, warm, swollen, and very painful
 - Very strong pain that quickly gets worse (often in an arm or leg)
 - Changes in skin colour
- Streptococcal toxic shock syndrome: an infection that can cause organs in the body to stop working properly. Symptoms include:
 - Flu-like symptoms (fever, chills, sore muscles, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea)
 - Feeling dizzy
 - Feeling confused
 - Sudden strong pain (often in an arm or leg)
 - A flat red rash on large areas of the body



How does GAS spread?

People sick with GAS are more likely to spread the infection to others.

It is spread person-to-person by:

- Breathing in germs after someone coughs or sneezes.
- Close contact with saliva or mucus of a person who is sick with GAS (for example: kissing, sharing cigarettes or vaping devices, or mouth-to-mouth breathing). It can also spread by touching infected sores.
- It can also be spread by sharing needles.

Who is most at risk of getting (invasive) GAS?

Some people have a higher chance of getting very sick from GAS, including:

- People living with chronic illnesses
- People living with a weakened immune system (their body has a harder time fighting germs)
- People less than 1 year of age or over 60 years of age
- People who use substances and share needles
- People living in group settings (for example, shelters or long-term care homes)

Is there treatment?

Getting treatment early helps prevent serious problems. GAS is treated with antibiotics (medicine that kills bacteria). Take all the medicine exactly as your health care provider tells you, even if you feel better.

How can I help prevent GAS?

- **Wash your hands often** with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If you can't wash, use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Use a tissue for a runny nose, cough, or sneeze. Throw it out, then wash or sanitize your hands.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow (not your hands).
- Avoid sharing drinks, food, cigarettes, or vaping devices.
- Stay up to date on vaccines. People who recently had the flu (influenza) or chickenpox may have a higher risk of invasive GAS.
- Wounds and cuts should be well cleansed, disinfected, and bandaged. Watch for redness, swelling, pus or pain. See a health care provider immediately if pain is very strong or you get a fever.