

What is group A Streptococcus?

Group A *Streptococcus* (GAS) is a bacteria commonly found in the throat and on the skin. Group A streptococci can be present in the throat or on the skin and cause no symptoms of illness, but they may also cause illnesses that range from mild to severe and even life threatening.

The majority of GAS infections are relatively mild illnesses, such as "strep throat" or impetigo. Occasionally, however, these bacteria can reach parts of the body where bacteria are not usually found, such as the blood, deep muscle and fat tissue, or the lungs, and can cause invasive infections.

How are group A streptococci spread?

Group A streptococci are spread by direct contact with drainage from the nose and throat of infected persons or by contact with infected wounds or sores on the skin.

Why does invasive group A streptococcal disease occur?

Invasive group A streptococcal infections occur when the bacteria get past the defenses of the person who is infected. This may occur when a person has sores or other breaks in the skin that allow the bacteria to get into the tissue.

Who is most at risk of getting invasive group A streptococcal disease?

Few people who come in contact with GAS will develop invasive GAS disease; many will have a routine throat or skin infection, and most will have no symptoms at all. Although healthy people can get invasive GAS disease, those with chronic illnesses like cancer, diabetes, and kidney disease needing dialysis, and those who use medications such as steroids are at higher risk. In addition, breaks in the skin, like cuts, wounds, or chickenpox lesions may provide an opportunity for the bacteria to enter the body.

How is group A streptococcal disease treated?

GAS infections can be treated with many different antibiotics. It is always important to complete the full course of antibiotics as ordered by your doctor.

What can be done to help prevent invasive group A streptococcal infections?

The spread of all types of GAS infections may be reduced by good handwashing, especially after coughing and sneezing, before preparing foods and before eating. Persons with sore throats should be seen by a doctor who can perform tests to find out whether it is strep throat; if so, the person should stay home from work, school, or child care until 24 hours or more after starting the antibiotic. All wounds should be kept clean and watched for possible signs of infection: increasing redness, swelling, drainage, and pain at the wound site. A person with signs of an infected wound (swelling, warmth or redness at the site) especially if fever develops, should seek medical care.