

Infection Prevention and Control

Group A Streptococcal (GAS) Infections



Magnified view of *Streptococcus pyogenes*

You can get further advice and information by:

- Asking your Doctor or Healthcare Professional

Other sources of information about health and health care:

- **UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA)** works with national and local government, industry and the NHS to protect and improve the nation's health and support healthier choices.
Website: [UK Health Security Agency - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)
- **NHS Choices** is the online 'front door' to the NHS. It is the country's biggest health website and gives all the information you need to make choices about your health.
Website: www.nhs.uk

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Information Leaflet



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Group A streptococcus (GAS) is a bacterium (germ) commonly found in the throat and on the skin. Some people can carry GAS without any symptoms of illness and its presence is harmless, this is known as being colonised, but like many other bacteria it can cause infection.

What infections does GAS cause?

Most GAS infections are relatively mild, for instance sore throat (strep throat) impetigo, or cellulitis. Most strep throats will pass without the need for treatment and skin infections may require a short course of antibiotics. Rarely GAS can cause severe illness known as invasive GAS disease.

What is invasive GAS infection?

Invasive GAS occurs when the bacterium enters a part of the body where it is not usually present e.g. the blood, muscle or lungs. Two of the most severe, but rare types of invasive GAS are –

- Necrotising fasciitis (a deep tissue infection) and
- Streptococcal Toxic Shock Syndrome.

How does it spread?

As GAS is found on the throat and the skin it may be passed from person to person through coughing, sneezing, kissing and skin contact. It may also be picked up from contact with surfaces such as door handles and light switches. This is why general cleanliness and hand hygiene is so important.

To prevent the spread of GAS, it is important that you wash your hands with soap and water or use the alcohol hand gel provided. If you have a throat infection, it is important that you cough/sneeze in to disposable tissues, throw these away promptly and then wash your hands or use the alcohol hand gel.

How is GAS treated?

Depending on where the GAS infection has occurred and the severity of the infection you may be prescribed antibiotics.

If you need to stay in hospital because of your infection you may be moved into a single room. This is to prevent GAS spreading to other patients.

Health care staff will wear a facemask and may wear gloves and a plastic apron when in contact with you, (the protective clothing that is worn is dependent on what care you are receiving). All cuts and abrasions must be covered with a waterproof dressing. This is to prevent spread of infection from person to person.

What about me and my visitors?

- Make sure you wash your hands after using a toilet/commode/bedpan/urinal; before eating or taking medication
- Hand wipes are a useful alternative if you cannot get to a hand wash basin
- Alcohol hand gel is not suitable for use after using the toilet commode/bedpan/urinal
- You can also help prevent the spread of infection by asking your healthcare worker and visitors if they have cleaned their hands
- All visitors should wash their hands with soap and water and/or use the alcohol gel on entering and leaving your room and the ward
- Due to the different types of patients in hospitals, it is important that you or your visitors do not visit patients in other parts of the ward or in other wards in the hospital
- Visitors must not sit on the bed they must use the chair provided by the ward staff
- Your visitor will be instructed what personal protective equipment they require depending on national guidance at the time and will be instructed how to remove this safely
- Ask your visitors to take your dirty washing home as soon as possible to be washed in the usual way, please ask a member of staff to access the locker for you

Friends and Family

Most people in close contact with GAS remain well and symptom free, although some develop a sore throat or mild skin infections. Healthy people can get invasive GAS from a relative or household member, though this is very rare.

Additional information

The most important thing to be aware of are the early signs and symptoms of invasive GAS which are:

- Raised temperature and/or fever
- Severe muscle aches
- Pain in one area of the body
- Redness at the site of a wound
- Vomiting or diarrhoea.

If symptoms develop contact your GP as medical advice should be sought immediately.