

Mom, I Have a sore throat!

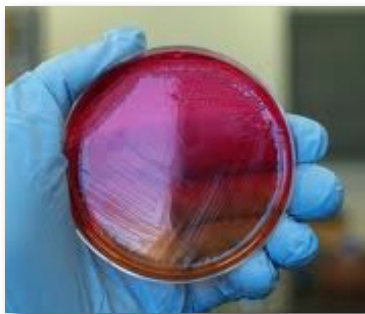
by Doug Puder, MD



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Rapid Strep tests will find about 90% of infected children.

The rest will be found by strep throat culture on the next two mornings...



Although a sore throat can be caused by a harmless virus, **strep throat** (group "A" streptococcus bacterial infection) must be ruled out. We worry about **strep throat** at all times of the year, but most often in winter. Children over three years old with symptoms of sore throat, fever, and swollen glands have the highest risk of **strep throat**.

Children with viral sore throats will recover within a few days without antibiotics. Yet children with **strep throat** must be treated with an antibiotic to prevent serious complications. A toxin produced by **strep** can damage the heart permanently! Antibiotic treatment for **strep** will prevent these complications if begun within a few days and continued for a full ten days. Fortunately, **strep** has not developed resistance to our usual antibiotics such as amoxicillin.

It maybe difficult to be sure a child with a sore throat does not have **strep throat** when they are examined, and a throat culture may be obtained. We perform a "**rapid strep test**" while your child is at our office, and also incubate a **strep culture**. This **strep culture** will be reviewed on the next two mornings. Positive **rapid strep tests** are very accurate, but miss about 10% of children with **strep**. The **strep culture** will diagnose the remaining group of children with **strep throat**.

Children with **strep throat** are contagious for 24 hours after antibiotics are started. When children are exposed to **strep**, they will usually become ill within two to five days. Family members and playmates of a child with **strep throat** do not require antibiotics unless they develop symptoms. Infants rarely develop **strep throat**, but parents should contact their doctor if their infant is ill. Children who feel well after ten days of treatment do **not** need a follow-up throat culture.

Parents often wonder if removing the tonsils might help? Most children will be better off as adults if they still have their tonsils, as tonsils are part of the immune system. Yet children who have more than six **strep throats** in one year (or five per year for several years) may need their tonsils removed. Rare cases of abscessed tonsils or sleep apnea may also require surgical removal of the tonsils.

Key Facts About Strep Throat:

- Strep Throat** is contagious for 24 hours after antibiotics are started.
- Only a full course of antibiotics (usually 10 days) will prevent heart disease, rheumatic joints, or other serious complications of **strep throat**!
- Follow-up throat cultures are **not** necessary if your child feels well after treatment.
- The incubation period is short, children usually get sick only a few days after exposure to strep (not longer than one week).
- Most children with strep throat do **not** need their tonsils removed.
- Parents can get **strep throat** too, and should call their doctor if they are sick.

We hope you find our *Parentletter* helpful and informative. Please keep in mind that receipt of this newsletter does not create a doctor/patient relationship and that it is not meant to serve as a substitute for professional medical advice. For particular pediatric medical concerns, including decisions about diagnoses, medications and other treatments, or if you have any questions after reading this newsletter, please speak with your child's pediatrician. (All illustrations © D.Puder,MD)