



Group A Streptococcal (GAS) Disease

What is Group A Streptococcus (GAS)?

Group A Streptococcus (GAS) is a common bacteria. Many of us carry it in our throats and on our skin, and it doesn't always result in illness. However, GAS does cause a number of infections, some mild (such as strep throat or [scarlet fever](#)) and some more serious.

The most serious infections come from invasive GAS, known as iGAS. These serious infections are caused by the bacteria getting into parts of the body where it is not normally found, such as the lungs, bloodstream or joints. In rare cases, an iGAS infection can cause death.

iGAS infections are uncommon in Bermuda.

Which infections does GAS cause?

GAS causes infections in the skin, soft tissue and respiratory tract. It is responsible for infections such as [strep throat](#), [scarlet fever](#), impetigo and cellulitis, among others.

While infections like these can be unpleasant, they rarely become serious. When treated with antibiotics, an unwell person with a mild illness like tonsillitis stops being contagious around 24 hours after starting their medication.

The first signs of scarlet fever can be flu-like symptoms, including a high temperature, a sore throat and swollen neck glands (a large lump on the side of your neck).

A rash appears 12 to 48 hours later. It looks like small, raised bumps, starting on the chest and tummy, then spreading. The rash makes your skin feel rough, like sandpaper. The rash will be less visible on darker skin but will still feel like sandpaper.

What is invasive GAS?

The most serious infections linked to GAS come from invasive group A strep, known as iGAS.

This can happen when a person has sores or open wounds that allow the bacteria to get into the tissue, breaches in their respiratory tract after a viral illness, or in a person who has a health condition that decreases their immunity to infection. When the immune system is weakened, a person is more vulnerable to invasive disease.

Which infections does invasive GAS cause?

Necrotising fasciitis, necrotising pneumonia and Streptococcal Toxic Shock Syndrome are some of the most severe but rare forms of invasive group A strep.

How is GAS spread?

GAS is spread by close contact with an infected person and can be passed on through coughs, sneezes, or a wound.

Some people can have the bacteria present in their body without feeling unwell or showing any symptoms of infections. While people without symptoms can pass it on, the risk of spread is much greater when a person is unwell.

How can we stop GAS infections from spreading?

Good hand and respiratory hygiene are important for preventing many bugs' spread. By teaching your child how to wash their hands properly with soap and warm water for 20 seconds, using a tissue to catch coughs and sneezes, and keeping away from others when feeling unwell, they will be able to reduce the risk of picking up, or spreading infections.

What should parents look out for?

It's always concerning when a child is unwell. GAS infections cause various symptoms such as sore throat, fever, chills and muscle aches.

As a parent, if you feel that your child seems seriously unwell, you should trust your own judgement.

Contact your GP:

- your child is getting worse
- your child is feeding or eating much less than normal
- your child has had a dry diaper for 12 hours or more or shows other signs of dehydration
- your baby is under 3 months and has a temperature of 101°F (38°C), or is older than 3 months and has a temperature of 102°F (39°C) or higher
- your baby feels hotter than usual when you touch their back or chest or feels sweaty
- your child is very tired or irritable

Call 911 or go to Emergency Department at KEMH if:

- your child is having difficulty breathing – you may notice grunting noises or their tummy sucking under their ribs
- there are pauses when your child breathes
- your child's skin, tongue or lips are blue
- your child is floppy and will not wake up or stay awake

What should people do if diagnosed with GAS (including Strep Throat & Scarlet Fever)?

Patients diagnosed with GAS will be prescribed a course of antibiotics by their doctor. They should start taking antibiotics as soon as possible and finish the complete course of antibiotics even if they feel better.

Patients should stay off nursery/school/work for 24 hours after you take the first dose of antibiotics.

What is the Office of the Chief Medical Officer doing about GAS?

No recent reported cases of invasive Group A Streptococcal Disease in Bermuda have been reported. However, the Office of the Chief Medical Officer actively monitors the situation. It has a well-established communicable disease surveillance system to detect cases. If cases are reported, we will take appropriate public health actions to reduce the risk of spread, particularly to vulnerable people. Patients with IGAS and their close contacts may be contacted by Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit and given additional health advice to prevent further spread.

If the situation changes, the Office of the Chief Medical Officer will release updated guidance.

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