

Streptococcus Bacteria: What You Need to Know



Dr. Alice Geroges Geagea
PharmD, PhD in biomedicine & neuroscience
University of Palermo, Italy

What is Streptococcus bacteria?

Streptococci are defined as Gram-positive, nonmotile, nonsporeforming and catalase-negative cocci that appear in chains or in pairs. The majority of streptococci are facultative anaerobes and some are strict anaerobes.

Where is Streptococcus bacteria found?

There are several types of Streptococcus bacteria. Two of them cause most of the strep infections in people: group A and group B.

Group A Streptococcus bacteria is located mainly in the throat and on the skin. The cause of strep throat is caused by a bacteria called Streptococcus pyogenes also known as Streptococcus A.

Group B streptococcal is usually found in the vagina and rectum of colonized women, it can be passed by sexual transmission. In healthy adults, the Group B Streptococcus (GBS) bacteria do not cause genital symptoms or discomfort. However, group B strep can sometimes cause a urinary tract infection or more serious infections such as blood infections or pneumonia.

What illnesses does Streptococcus infections cause?

Group B Streptococcus bacteria usually cause infections in newborn babies, such as lung infection, meningitis and blood poisoning.

Group A Streptococcus bacteria however is responsible of more frequent infections observed in children as well as adults. We can enumerate the most commons:

- Strep throat: a sore, red inflamed throat. The tonsils are

usually swollen and white spots can be seen on them.

- Impetigo: a skin infection
- Scarlet fever: an illness that follows strep throat. It is characterized by a red rash on the body.
- Cellulitis and necrotizing fasciitis (flesh-eating disease)
- Toxic shock syndrome.

Streptococcal bacteria are highly contagious. They can spread via airborne droplets when somebody with the infection sneezes or coughs or via shared food or drinks.

How is streptococcus infection treated? Can it be prevented?

When diagnosed by a physician, strep throat and Streptococcus A infections are treated with an antibiotic. These medications will inhibit the spread of bacteria and stop the infections.

Several types of antibiotics are available but penicillin and amoxicillin are the most common medications prescribed and given for a strep infection.

Since Streptococcus is highly contagious, prevention and awareness are the best ways to avoid spreading the infection. A person with the disease must follow these simple recommendations in order not to transmit the disease to others:

- Avoid close contact with other people until you have been taking the antibiotic for 24 to 48 hours so that others will not be exposed to the strep bacteria.
 - Use tissues when coughing and dispose of them carefully.
 - Hand washing is the best method of prevention. Wash your hands before touching food, dishes, glasses, silverware, napkins, etc. It is very important!
 - Wash you hands after coughing and before touching certain things, like food, dishes, glasses, silverware or napkins.
 - Use paper cups, or separate cups, and paper towels in bathrooms instead of shared drinking cups and hand towels.
 - Do not prepare food for others.
 - Do not share food and eating utensils with others.
- It is crucial to say that a person with strep throat infection must not attend childcare, preschool, school or go to work until he is no longer contagious.

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