



Pediatric Clinic
PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUTS

Strep Throat

Strep throat is a term to describe a sore throat (pharyngitis or tonsillitis) caused by a particular germ called group A beta-hemolytic *Streptococcus*. There are many other causes of sore throat that are actually more common than Strep, but Strep is the **only** cause of sore throat that can or should routinely be treated with antibiotics. Most sore throats, whether caused by Strep or other germs, last three to five days.

Even experienced doctors cannot tell Strep from these other causes just by looking – it requires a Strep test (throat culture or Rapid Strep Test) to tell for sure. It is important to know for sure, because Strep throat **needs** to be treated with antibiotics, and other causes of sore throat **should not** be routinely treated with antibiotics.

Strep throat is known to potentially produce some *rare* but *serious* complications, including Rheumatic Fever. Since Rheumatic Fever can damage the heart, it is important to prevent this complication by treating Strep throat with antibiotics (penicillin works fine). In fact, the **only** reason to treat Strep throat is to prevent Rheumatic fever. *The antibiotic does little, if anything, to make the sore throat better, even when Strep is the cause!*

These days, over-prescribing of antibiotics has led to a dangerous situation with resistant germs. This makes it extremely important that antibiotics are not prescribed unless they are absolutely necessary. It is absolutely necessary to treat Strep throat with antibiotics, but it is equally important to avoid antibiotics for all other sore throats.

To summarize:

- Strep throat should be treated with antibiotics, other sore throats should not
- Strep throat lasts three to five days, regardless of treatment
- The reason to treat Strep throat is to prevent Rheumatic Fever, not to make the sore throat better
- The only way to diagnose Strep throat is with a Strep test (throat culture or Rapid Strep Test)

For these reasons, your health provider will need to test you for Strep before any decision can be made about treatment. The most accurate way to test is with a culture, but the results of this test take around 24 hours. This is fine in most cases, and it certainly does no harm to wait! In some cases (for example, during times of the year when Strep is very common, or when a long holiday weekend is coming up, or when the family plans to travel) it is better to do a Rapid Strep Test.

The Pediatric Clinic and **The Family Medicine Clinic** both offer strep tests on a walk-in basis (without an appointment). Call ahead to make sure the clinic is open and find out what is a good time to come in. In most cases of uncomplicated sore throat, this is the easiest and best way to find out if you need a prescription.

If an antibiotic is prescribed it is extremely important to take the full 10-day course!