

Sore throat: Is it strep or something else?

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It's a common complaint, "Mom, my throat hurts." The quandary for many parents is why does it hurt? Is it a virus or something more? For some infections, like strep throat, that question can be difficult to determine without help.

"Group A streptococcus, or strep throat, is the cause of a [sore throat](#) in about 3 out of every 10 children and it's more common in late fall and early spring," said Josephine Dlugopolski-Gach, MD, a pediatrician at Loyola University Health System and assistant professor in the Department of Pediatrics at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine. "The difficult part is that strep doesn't always present in the same way and some strep carriers are asymptomatic."

Many schools are seeing outbreaks of strep throat with some students being infected several times - as many as three separate infections in less than two months.

"I have seen kids who have improved after taking the full course of antibiotic only to be infected again. You don't become immune to this infection so you can get it over and over again," Dlugopolski said. "It is extremely important for parents to keep their children home when they are sick. If they are diagnosed with strep, a child needs to be on an antibiotic and without a fever for 24 hours before going back to school," Dlugopolski said.

Though it's difficult to discern strep throat in all ages, it's hardest in children who are ages 5 and younger since they are not as capable of

describing their symptoms.

"I had a family that was in and out of my office with strep throat for months and we couldn't figure out where it was coming from. Finally, they took the family dog to the vet and found out he had strep and they were getting it from him. When trying to find out the source of strep, don't leave any rock unturned," Dlugopolski said.

- Fever more than 101 degrees F
- Severe sore throat
- Pain when swallowing
- Swollen tonsils and lymph nodes
- White or yellow spots on the back of a bright red throat

Other possible symptoms are:

- Headache
- Belly pain
- Vomiting
- Not feeling hungry
- Body aches
- Red skin rash

"Rarely do children get all these symptoms, but one good indicator that [children](#) may have strep is to determine if they have come in contact with someone with strep. But the only way to know for sure is to make an appointment with your doctor who can run a simple test in the office to determine if the infection is viral or [strep throat](#)," Dlugopolski said. "There is a small chance of strep leading to [rheumatic fever](#), which infects the heart valves and can cause kidney damage so take it seriously and talk to your doctor.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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