Fact Sheet
Necrotizing Fasciitis

What is necrotizing fasciitis?
Necrotizing fasciitis (flesh-eating disease) is a severe infection that spreads quickly through the tissue (flesh) around the muscles. In some cases death can occur within 18 hours. Necrotizing fasciitis kills about 20 to 30 percent of those who get it.

What causes it?
Necrotizing fasciitis is caused by a number of different germs, one of which is the group A streptococcal (strep) bacteria. The bacteria are found on the skin, in the nose or throat of healthy people. Not everyone who carries these germs will get sick, and the germs can cause milder illnesses such as strep throat and skin infections.

What are the symptoms of the disease?
The most common symptom is a sudden onset of pain and swelling with redness of the infected area. Fever may also occur. Individuals with "flesh-eating disease" usually have a lot of pain in the infected area—they know something is wrong.

How is it spread?
Group A streptococcus is normally passed from person to person through close personal contact. Kissing, or sharing drinking cups, forks, spoons or cigarettes are common examples. Individuals at highest risk of getting it from an infected person are living in the same house or sleep in the same house. Individuals who have direct contact with the infected person's mouth or nose secretions are placing themselves at risk.

How can it be prevented?
• Proper and frequent hand washing.
• Do not share straws, cups, bottles, forks, spoons, cigarettes or anything with saliva (spit) on it.
• Cough or sneeze into your elbow or sleeve, or use a tissue. Make sure you throw out the tissue and wash your hands.
• Keep all wounds clean and watch for any changes such as; redness, swelling, oozing, fever or increasing pain at the wound site.
• If an individual has the symptoms it is important to get help early.
• If you are in close contact with a person with invasive GAS (such as living in the same house) you may require antibiotics.
There is no vaccine to prevent Group A streptococcal infections.

How is it treated?
Antibiotics are an important part of the treatment for these infections and surgery is commonly needed to remove damaged tissue and stop the disease from spreading.

What are your chances of getting it?
Getting necrotizing fasciitis caused by Group A streptococcus is low. Necrotizing fasciitis may occur in three to seven persons per 1,000,000 people per year. Individuals who have prolonged contact with a person with necrotizing fasciitis are at low risk getting the disease; however it is important to use proper prevention and care.

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