

# Fact sheet

## Invasive Group A Streptococcal (iGAS) Disease

### What is invasive Group A Streptococcal (iGAS) disease?

Group A streptococci (GAS) are bacteria found in the throat and on the skin of healthy people. Most GAS infections are relatively mild illnesses such as sore throat or minor skin infections. Severe GAS disease may occur when bacteria get into parts of the body where bacteria usually are not found, such as the blood, muscle, or the lungs. These infections are termed "invasive GAS disease."

### What are the symptoms of iGAS disease?

Symptoms for the more severe diseases may include:

Necrotizing fasciitis: severe pain and swelling (often rapidly increasing), fever and/or redness at a wound site

Streptococcal toxic shock syndrome (STSS): fever, abrupt onset of generalized or localized severe pain (often in an arm or leg), confusion and/or a flat red rash over large areas of the body (only occurs in 10% of cases)

### How is it spread?

GAS is most commonly spread from person to person through saliva (spit) or direct contact (touching) infected wounds or sores on the skin as well as items that have touched these wounds.

GAS bacteria can survive on personal items such as toothbrushes or cigarettes and it is recommended that you never share these items

Places where lots of people are gathered together can make it easy for GAS to spread (such as daycares, schools, overcrowded homes etc.).

An infected person will not pass the germs on to others after he/she has taken appropriate antibiotics for at least 24 hours.

### Who can get it?

Anyone can get strep throat or a minor GAS skin infection. Few people who come in contact with GAS will develop invasive GAS disease. Although healthy people can get invasive GAS disease, people with chronic illnesses like cancer, diabetes, and chronic heart or lung disease have a higher risk. Persons with skin lesions (such as cuts, chicken pox, and surgical wounds), the elderly, and adults with a history of alcohol abuse or injection drug use also have a higher risk for invasive disease.

### How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will take a sample (swab) from your throat or other infection site and will test it to see if the bacteria are present.

### What is the treatment?

GAS disease is usually treated with antibiotics. For those with very severe illness, supportive care in an intensive care unit may also be needed. In situations where an individual has been diagnosed with invasive disease, antibiotics may also be recommended for their close contacts. Your health care provider will determine if this is required.

### What can be done to prevent infection?

Proper and frequent hand washing is the best way to prevent all types of GAS infection. Always wash hands after coughing or sneezing, and before and after caring for a sick person. Avoid sharing drinks, cigarettes, eating utensils, and toothbrushes.

Wounds (like cuts or scrapes) should be kept clean and watched for signs of infection; if a wound becomes red or swollen or if you develop a fever or a painful sore throat, see your health care provider.

Daycare centers and schools should clean toys and surfaces daily with an approved disinfectant solution.

