Let's Talk ABOUT...

Strep throat

Strep throat, (short for "Streptococcus" is a throat infection caused by Streptococcus bacteria. A child with strep throat should receive antibiotics. If they do not receive antibiotics, they could have more serious problems like **rheumatic** (roo-MA-tik) **fever**. Rheumatic fever causes a person's joints, heart, kidneys or other tissues to swell. Fortunately, these problems are very rare.

Most sore throats are not strep throat. They happen when a child has a cold or flu (a virus). This type of sore can also be caused by an allergy, dry air, pollution, smoking, or second hand smoke. These types of sore throat are usually painful and annoying but only last two to four days. Most go away on their own and the child does not need antibiotics.

A person with strep throat can spread the bacteria when they cough, sneeze or touch another person. The bacteria is in the mucus in the nose and throat. After being exposed to the bacteria it takes 12 hours or up to five days before the child gets ill with strep throat. A sore throat caused by strep can be mild, with just a "tickle," or very painful especially when swallowing. Children often have a fever (100.4°F, 38°C or higher), headache, stomachache, and sore, swollen lymph nodes (glands) in the neck. If a child's strep throat does not receive antibiotics, the child can feel uncomfortable for about two to five days. If the child receives antibiotics, the illness lasts about one to three days.

How do tell if a child has strep throat and how do you treat it?

Your child's doctor or healthcare provider will perform a test called a throat culture or rapid strep test to see if your child has strep throat. The test results are usually available in one or two days. It is OK to wait to treat the infection for one or two days.

Waiting one or two days does not increase the risk of complications. If the test result shows strep throat, your child should stay home from school or day care for 24 hours after they start taking antibiotic medicine.

If your child has strep throat, her healthcare provider will order an antibiotic. The antibiotic, usually penicillin, can be taken by mouth (pill or liquid) or as a shot. Your child must take the antibiotic pills or liquid for a full 10 days to so she does not get another infection or complications. It is very important that she takes the antibiotic as prescribed for the correct number of days, even if she gets better right away.

Do not give your child antibiotics that are not prescribed for her. Antibiotics will not help if a sore throat is from a virus, allergy, or irritation from the air. Most sore throats will improve on their own within one to two weeks. Taking antibiotics when they are not needed can be harmful. Each time your child takes an antibiotic, the bacteria that normally lives in the body (for example, on the skin, in the intestine, in the mouth and nose) are more likely to become resistant to antibiotics. Common antibiotics are not able to kill resistant bacteria.

How can I help my child be more comfortable?

You can give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol*) for aches, pains, or fever. Remember, always use over-the-counter products as directed. Many of them are not recommended for children younger than a certain age so check the label.

During the first days of your child's illness, she should avoid spicy foods and strongly flavored or acidic juices (for example orange juice). These can make throat pain worse. Encourage your child to

drink liquids even if she does not want to eat . Cool drinks, Popsicles*, or hard candies may help relieve her throat pain.

Older children can gargle with warm salt water (one teaspoon of table salt in one cup of water) or they can drink tea with honey.

Special Note about Aspirin:

If your child has chickenpox or influenza (flu), do not give her aspirin. This is because aspirin in these illnesses may cause a serious disease called Reye's syndrome. It is hard to tell if your child has the flu, so talk to your doctor before you give your child aspirin for any illness.

When can my child go back to school or daycare?

Your child can return to school or daycare if she has a normal temperature and it is 24 hours after she started to take antibiotics.

How can I help my child prevent sore throats?

Always wash your hands

Avoid contact with people who have colds or other lung infections.

Avoid smoking or do not expose children to second hand smoke.

What should I do if my child has problems?

If your child has these problems, take her to the nearest hospital right away:

- Trouble swallowing or breathing
- Drooling all the time
- Her lips look blue

If your child has these problems, call your child's doctor right away:

- A fever over 104°F (40°C)
- Not drinking enough liquids
- Trouble opening her mouth
- Extreme weakness

If your child has these problems, call your child's doctor during regular office hours:

- Your child has an earache.
- Your child has very tender, swollen, or red neck glands.
- Your child has a fever or illness that lasts more than five days
- Someone else in the family has a sore throat.

