

Connect Care: Strep Throat Testing

What's causing my sore throat?

If you or your child has a sore throat, the correct treatment depends on what's causing it. This handout is to help you learn the cause of your sore throat and the correct treatment.

A sore throat may be caused by:

- **Bacteria, such as strep** (short for Streptococcus). The correct treatment for strep throat is **antibiotic medicine**. If strep is not treated with antibiotics, it could lead to rare but serious problems like rheumatic fever.
- **A virus or other cause.** Most sore throats are not strep throat. They happen when a person has a cold or flu virus. Or, they can be caused by allergy, dry air, pollution, or smoke. These sore throats generally last less than a week. **Most go away on their own** and antibiotics do not help.

How do I know if I have strep?

The Connect Care team has arranged for you to get a rapid strep test at an Intermountain Pharmacy or Lab. During the test, your throat is swabbed and the sample is checked for bacteria. Results are usually available in less than 30 minutes.

What to do first:

- Take a rapid strep test**

The Connect Care provider will help find the nearest place to go for the test. You can also go to: intermountainhealthcare.org/c/connect-care-testing-locations

The person giving the test can tell you in less than 30 minutes if the test is negative or positive.

(Children age 3 and under cannot use this process. They need to be seen in person.)

If your rapid strep test is NEGATIVE, your chance of having strep is very low. Your symptoms are caused by a virus or other cause. Antibiotics will not make you feel better any faster.

To confirm the negative result, Connect Care will use the samples from the rapid strep test to do a throat culture. A Connect Care provider will let you know the results of the throat culture within 72 hours (3 days).

Your next steps are:

- Follow the information on page 2 for using over-the-counter medicines.**
- If your symptoms don't improve within 7 days, please see a provider in person.

If your rapid strep test is POSITIVE, or if your throat culture is positive, your sore throat is caused by bacteria. Antibiotic medicine will help you get better and can prevent other problems.

- The Connect Care team will prescribe antibiotic medicine. You need to pick it up.**
 - You can pick up your medicine at an Intermountain pharmacy.
 - If you prefer, the prescription can be called into a non-Intermountain pharmacy. Let the Connect Care team know the pharmacy name and phone number.
 - Be sure to take your test results with you.

You may also use over-the-counter medicines to help you feel better while you're taking your antibiotic. See the list on page 2.

Questions? Contact the Connect Care provider at:
Phone 1-801-442-2610 or email ConnectCare@imail.org.

Treatment for your symptoms

General treatment

- **Rest.** This is one of the best things you can do.
- **Drink lots of water and other fluids.**
- **Wash your hands often.**
- **Don't share foods or drinks.**
- **Rinse your sinuses with salt water.**
- **Stay away from smoke.** Smoke worsens symptoms and slows recovery.
- **Use an extra pillow.** If a cough or stuffy nose keeps you up at night, use an extra pillow to lift your head a bit.
- **Get a flu shot every year** to lower your risk of viral infections in the future.

Over-the-counter medicines

Over-the-counter medicines won't help you get better faster, but some people find they help relieve symptoms and let you rest easier.

- **Sore throat:** Lozenges or cough drops may soothe a sore or dry throat. You can also try gargling with salt water. You can make your own by mixing 1 cup warm water with 1/2 teaspoon salt.
- **Pain or fever:** Use acetaminophen (like Tylenol) or ibuprofen (like Advil or Motrin). Refer to the directions on the package or discuss with your Connect Care provider.
- **Stuffy or runny nose:** Research shows that decongestants and antihistamines do not improve symptoms very much. Do not use decongestants or antihistamines in children.
- **Cough:** A cough can be a sign of asthma or other serious problems. For relief at home, try cough medicine, though studies show that most don't help. Rubbing Vicks VapoRub on the chest may help as well.

Antibiotic questions

Why can't I have antibiotics?

- **Antibiotics kill bacteria, not viruses.** Most sore throats, colds, and coughs are caused by viruses. Antibiotics will **NOT** help someone with a virus feel better faster.
- **Using antibiotics when they're not needed can do more harm than good.** As more antibiotics are used, the bacteria build up resistance. Common antibiotics may not kill these resistant germs, so more toxic and costly antibiotics are needed. Sometimes, these resistant bacterial infections need to be treated in a hospital — and can even lead to death. Also, as with any medicine, you could have unexpected allergies or side effects.

Why not take an antibiotic now to prevent a bacterial infection?

Most viral infections do **NOT** lead to bacterial infections like strep. Using an antibiotic now can make that same antibiotic not work the next time it's needed. If you get an infection, it can be much harder to treat. It's best to wait and use antibiotics only if a bacterial infection is confirmed.

When to schedule an in-person visit

At any point in your illness, if you have signs of infection getting worse, go to an InstaCare for an in-person visit. These symptoms include:

- Fever over 102°F
- Shaking chills
- Difficulty breathing
- Inability to swallow
- Uncontrolled pain

Contact the Connect Care provider at:

- Phone: 1-801-442-2610
- Email: ConnectCare@imail.org
- Website: intermountainconnectcare.org

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