

# Strep Throat: A Common Conundrum

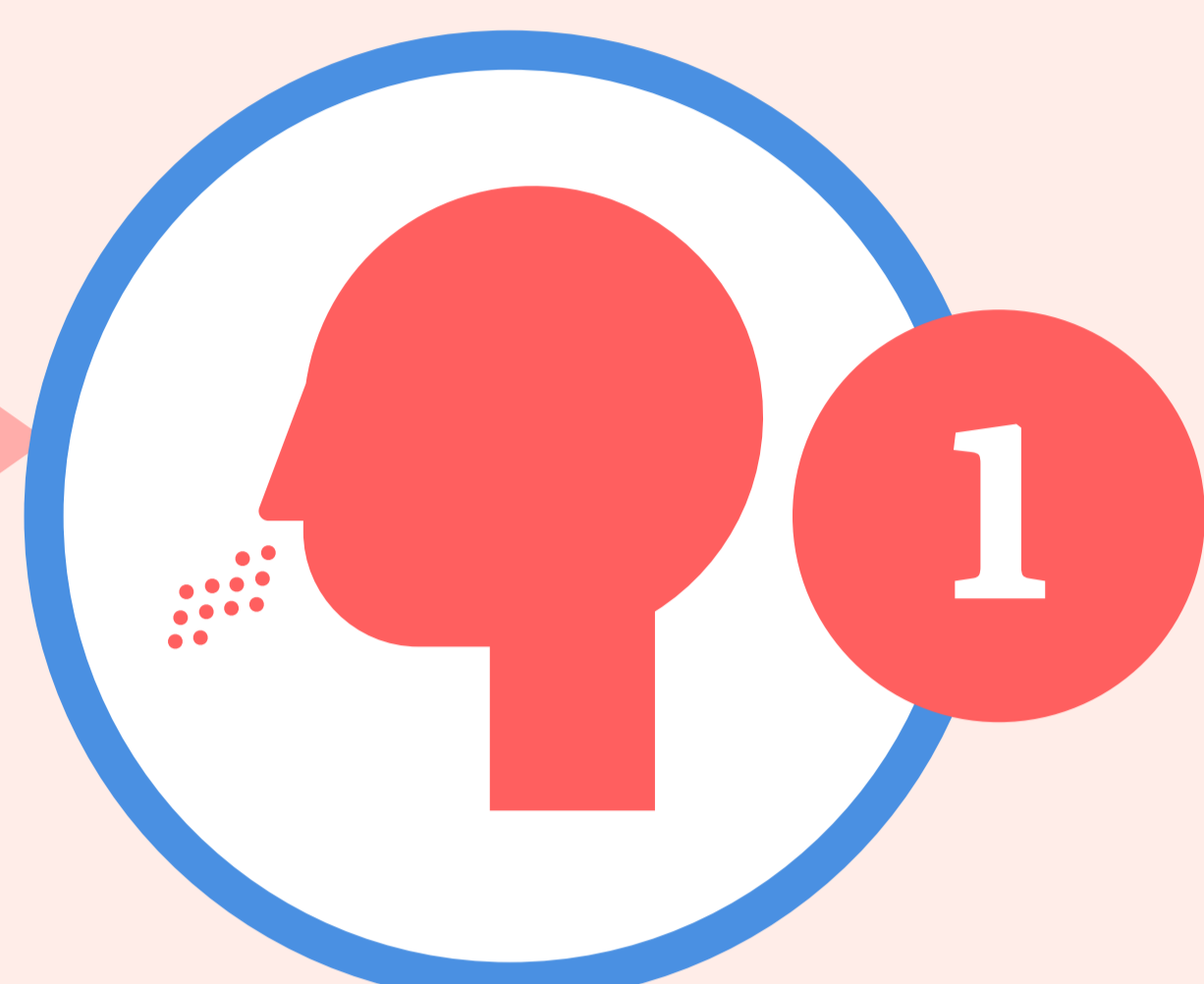
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Strep throat is an infection of the throat (pharyngitis) caused by a bacteria called *Streptococcus pyogenes* or **group A streptococcus (GAS)**. Most throat infections are caused by viruses and do not need antibiotics. Antibiotics are prescribed for strep throat to prevent complications.

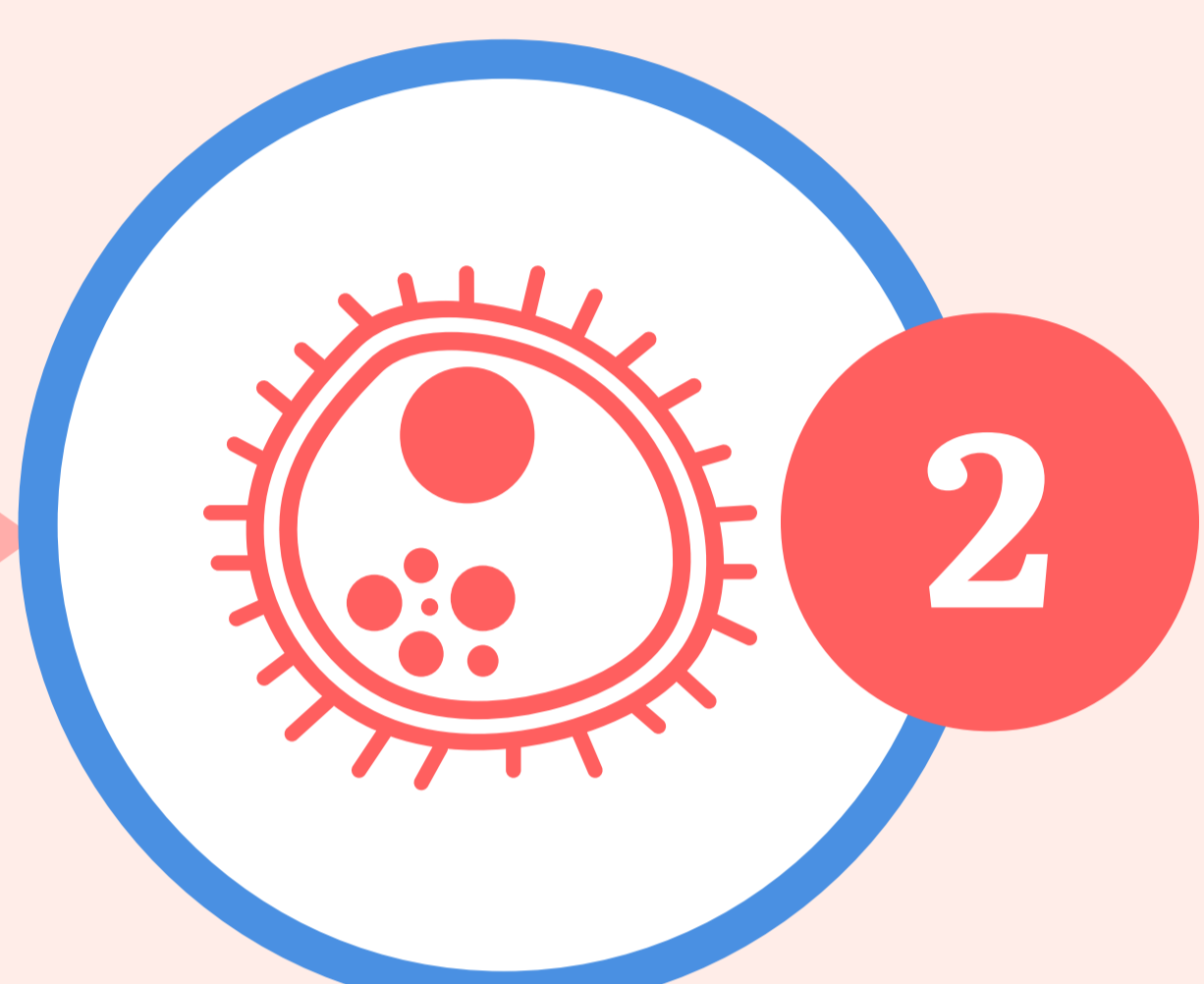
*Read more to learn about the diagnosis and treatment of strep throat.*

## How does GAS spread and cause strep throat?



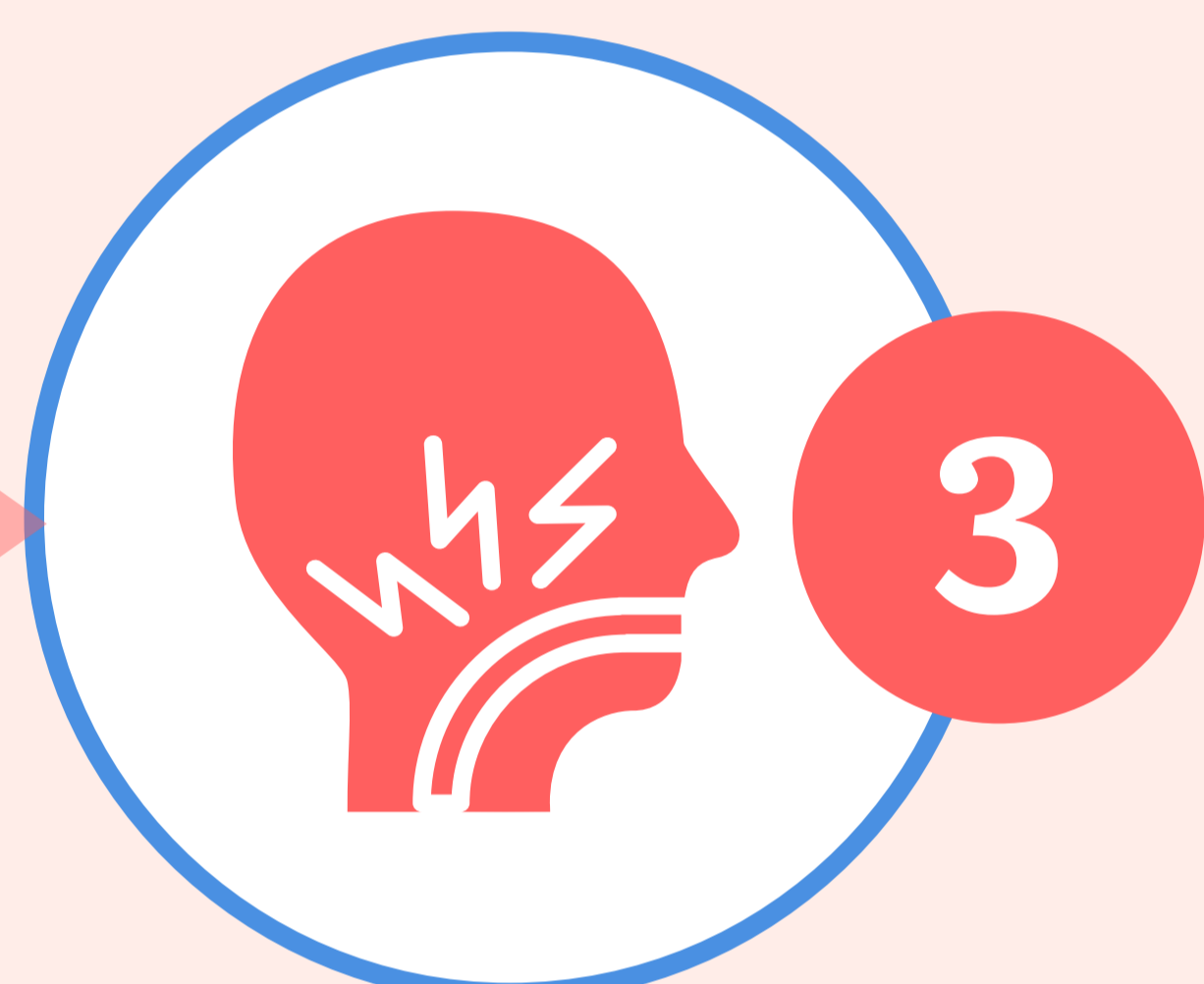
Strep throat is spread from person to person through **respiratory droplets**. It is most common among children **5-15 years old**. Patients can be infected or colonized. Symptoms typically begin 2-5 days after an exposure, and infections peak in **late winter and early spring**.

## What is infection vs. colonization?



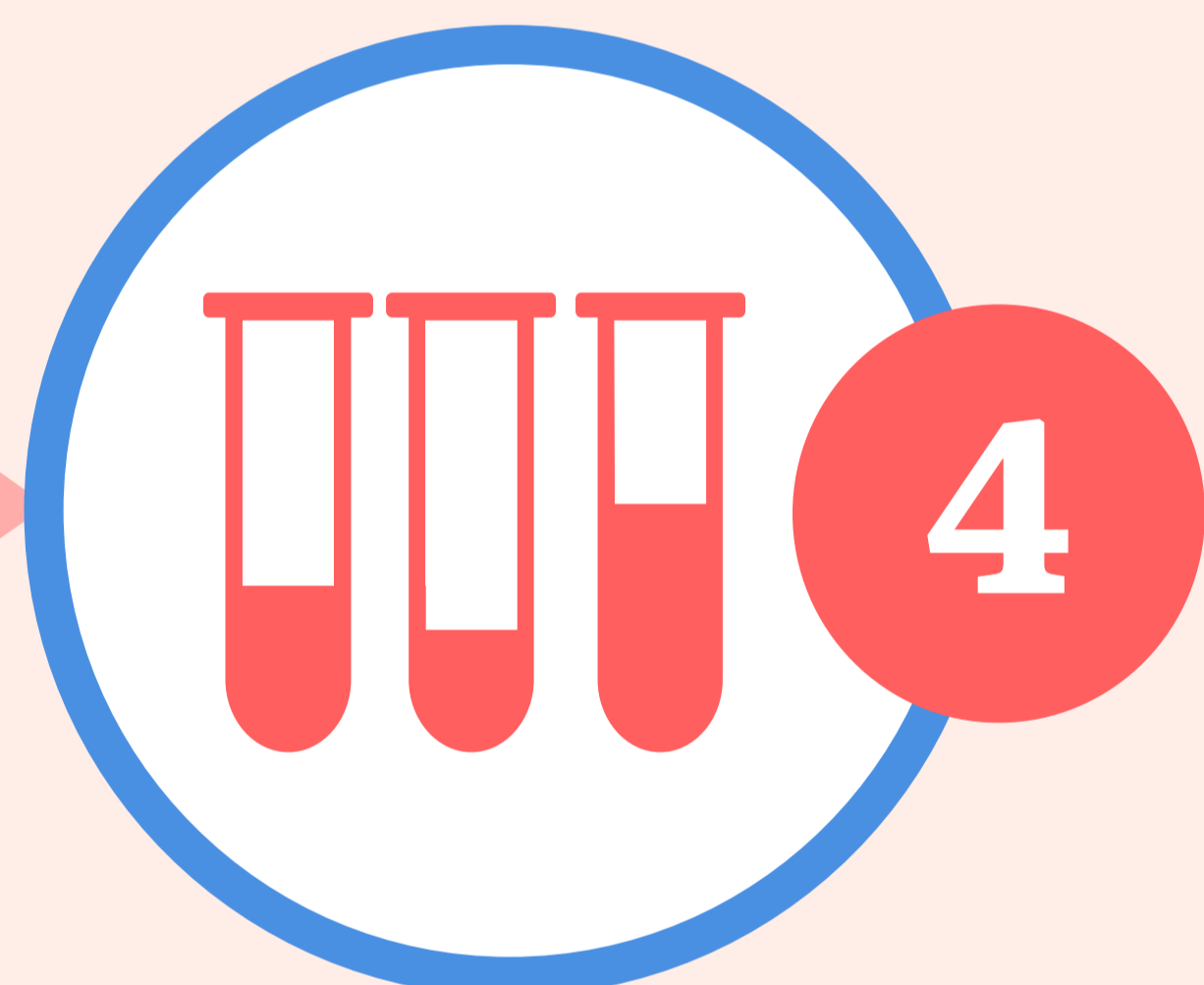
Colonization is the persistent presence of bacteria, but unlike infection, patients do not have symptoms of illness. GAS colonizes the throat in **2-20% of children and 4-5% of adults**. Because of colonization, a child may **continue to test positive for GAS even after treatment with antibiotics** OR test positive **without any symptoms** of strep throat. Colonization is not normally harmful and **does not require antibiotics**.

## What are symptoms of strep throat?



**Sore throat, fever, exudate (or fluid) seen on tonsils, and swollen lymph nodes**. Cold symptoms (runny nose, cough, etc.) usually do not occur with strep throat.

## How is strep throat diagnosed?



In patients with symptoms, a **swab is obtained of the throat and tonsils**. Usually, both a rapid antigen detection test (**RADT**) and a **throat culture** are performed on the swab as RADTs can miss up to 30% of cases if done alone. If either tests are positive in a symptomatic patient, antibiotics may be prescribed. Strep throat is **UNCOMMON in children under 3 years** and these patients should **NOT be tested** unless there is a household contact with strep throat and the child has symptoms.

## 5 How is strep throat treated?

**Penicillin or amoxicillin** are the **most effective** treatments for strep throat. These antibiotics are very effective, well tolerated, narrow-spectrum, and inexpensive. [Click here](#) for information on dosing/duration and alternative treatment options.

Symptoms resolve without treatment in 3-5 days, but the **primary goal of treatment is preventing complications**.

## 6 What complications can occur?

Antibiotics can **reduce symptoms** and prevent rare complications such as acute otitis media, peritonsillar abscesses, or other infections. It may also prevent rare inflammatory complications such as rheumatic fever. Antibiotic treatment can **prevent spread** of infection to others.

## 7 What can I do to help my child feel better?

**Appropriate testing** is important because it determines whether antibiotics are needed to treat an infection. **Supportive care** (rest, soft diet, adequate fluid intake) and **pain medication** with ibuprofen or acetaminophen should be offered if recommended by a provider for fever or pain control.



Click [here](#) to take a short quiz



Guest author, Dinh Ho, is a 3rd year Physician Assistant student at UMKC who plans on graduating in May with an interest in primary care. When not studying, she enjoys spending time with her boyfriend, pet cat, Sophie, and trying new restaurants in Kansas City!