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SORE THROAT/STREP THROAT

Pharyngitis, the medical term for a sore throat, is a very common problem for children. The diagnosis of pharyngitis can be a challenge. A sore throat can be part of the common cold or it may be associated with a more serious illness like mononucleosis. Sore throats can develop life threatening complications, such as rheumatic fever or abscesses that can compromise breathing.

CAUSE AND SYMPTOMS

Many sore throats are caused by viruses, in which case antibiotics aren't required because they don't work against viruses. Other sore throats are caused by bacteria. **Your doctor should never guess over the phone whether your child's sore throat is due to strep.** The only way to diagnose the cause of a sore throat is by examination and testing.

HOW TO SOOTHE A SORE THROAT

- Make sure your child rests, especially if he has a fever.
- If an older child complains of a sore throat — particularly one associated with coughing during a cold — soothe the tissues with a mixture of warm water or chamomile tea with honey and lemon juice. **Honey should not be given to a child under the age of 1 because of the risk of infant botulism.**
- Give lots of fluids, which are easy to swallow and will prevent dehydration.
- Acetaminophen or ibuprofen may ease the discomfort and make it less painful for your child to take fluids.
- Use a cool mist humidifier to keep air moist, or set up an impromptu cool sauna in your shower.
- Prevent the spread of possible disease by keeping your child isolated from other family members and friends. Wash hands often.

STREP THROAT

A sudden sore throat is more likely to be caused by bacteria called streptococcus, rather than a virus, which tends to attack more gradually. If your child wakes up dramatically sicker than the night before with a sore throat, suspect strep.

Other symptoms of strep include **fever, chills, headache, stomachache and a red, severely sore throat.** Children between the ages of 2 and 3 may have different symptoms, including moderate fever, cough, a head cold, vomiting and loss of appetite. Look for a red throat. **(Children under age 3 rarely get strep throat.)**

Your child's doctor can perform a rapid strep test that will provide results in as little as 10 to 15 minutes. If it is strep, antibiotics will be prescribed. Remember to keep



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giving the medication for the amount of days prescribed **even if your child seems to be feeling better and even if you missed a dose.**

Because strep easily spreads to others, keep your child home from school and day care. **He can usually return after 24 hours of antibiotic treatment.** The incubation period (the period that the bacteria is in your child without him acting sick) is three to five days, but if left **untreated, strep can remain contagious for weeks.**

SCARLET FEVER

Scarlet fever also is caused by streptococcus. It is characterized by a fine, raised rash that is rough to the touch. The rash can appear on any area of the body, except the face. In some patients, peeling of the skin on the hands, feet and sometimes the groin can occur in about a week after the onset of the infection. Scarlet fever is no more harmful than strep throat, but it also must be treated with antibiotics. Again, give the medication for the amount of days prescribed.