Streptococcal “strep” Sore Throat/Scarlet Fever Fact Sheet

Cause
Streptococcus bacteria (group A beta hemolytic strep)

Symptoms
Sudden onset of fever, sore throat with exudates, swollen glands, headache, abdominal pain. Nausea and vomiting may occur with severe cases, as may kidney problems, peritonsillar abscesses, or rheumatic fever.

Scarlet fever is characterized by a fever, sore throat, red sandpaper-like rash and a red "strawberry" tongue. It is caused by several different strains of the streptococcal bacteria, all of which produce a toxin that causes the characteristic red rash. It is treated in the same manner as strep throat.

Spread
Person-to-person spread from nose and throat secretions of infected persons or carriers; rarely, indirect contact through objects. Outbreaks may follow ingestion of food contaminated by an infected food handler’s nasal secretions or streptococci present on skin.

Incubation Period
Short, usually 1-3 days, rarely longer

Period of Communicability
In untreated, uncomplicated cases, 10-21 days; in untreated conditions with purulent discharges, weeks or months. Only 24 hours after treatment has begun.

Diagnosis
Confirmed by identification of strep in the throat, either by throat culture or by a rapid test that can provide same day results.

Treatment
Penicillin drug, either injected or oral form, given for a full 10 days. Treatment will prevent the complication of more serious such as rheumatic fever, which can damage the heart.

Prevention/Control
- Cover mouth when coughing or sneezing.
- Proper hand washing.
- Completion of the full course of antibiotics.

Exclusion
Until 24 hours after treatment has begun and no fever is present.