



# **Group A Streptococcus Information leaflet for healthcare workers**

## **What is Group A Streptococcus?**

Group A Streptococcus (or GAS (Streptococcus pyogenes)) is a bacterium which can be found in (colonise) the throat and skin and lead to mild infections such as 'strep throat' or impetigo.

Invasive group A Streptococcus (*i*GAS) is a more serious infection and happens when the bacteria is isolated from a normally sterile site of the body, such as blood, muscle tissue or lungs. This is rare but can result in streptococcal toxic shock syndrome or necrotizing fasciitis, which are both life-threatening.

Vulnerable groups, including pregnant women and women who have recently given birth, newborn babies (neonates), older people and people who have a weak immune system (immunocompromised), are more at risk of getting GAS infections.

## **What are the signs and symptoms of GAS?**

It is essential that, as a healthcare worker, you recognise the early signs and symptoms of GAS. These are:

- a sore throat, that usually comes on suddenly;
- tonsils that are red or swollen (or both) and that may discharge pus;
- swollen lymph nodes in the neck;
- fever;
- aching or tender muscles; and
- redness at the site of a wound.

## **How is GAS spread?**

GAS is most commonly spread through:

- direct or indirect contact with other people, for example when changing a wound dressing or touching contaminated equipment; and
- droplets in the respiratory tract being released, for instance through coughing and sneezing.

You must consistently apply standard infection-control precautions (SICPs) and contact precautions as part of transmission-based precautions (TBPs), to minimise the risk of cross-transmission of infection. You must apply these precautions at all times for confirmed cases or cases where you suspect patients are infectious.

**What should I do if I develop symptoms of GAS?**

If you develop any signs or symptoms of GAS, you must not provide care as you are at risk of transmitting the bacterium to others.

You should:

- get advice from your GP; and
- tell your line manager and Occupational Health Department as soon as possible.

If there is a suspected or actual incident or outbreak of a healthcare associated infection (HAI), you should contact the Infection Prevention and Control Team (IPCT).

**When are staff screened for GAS?**

On rare occasions staff may be screened for GAS and asked to provide a swab for testing. This may be as a result of an ongoing incident or outbreak within a specific area or department.

The decision to screen or test staff members is never taken lightly and only when advised by the Incident Management Team (IMT). This will be fully discussed and explained to you beforehand.

If you are asked to provide swabs, your Occupational Health Department will give you support and information.

You can contact them on: .....

## Further information

You can get further advice from the local IPCT on: .....

You can also get more information from the following.

- National Infection Prevention and Control Manual  
<http://www.nipcm.hps.scot.nhs.uk/>
- Patient information leaflet for GAS  
<https://www.hps.scot.nhs.uk/haic/ic/resourcedetail.aspx?id=3507>

