

# Pharyngitis

Throat infections (also called **pharyngitis**) are very common, and can be caused by either viral or bacterial infections.

## VIRAL PHARYNGITIS

Viral pharyngitis is a type of sore throat caused by a viral infection, and can often also be associated with a runny nose, tender glands in your neck, and a cough. Most sore throats are caused by these types of viral infections, and often resolve on their own in 3-10 days.

While there are many things you can do to help decrease the discomfort of a viral sore throat (see below), antibiotics aren't needed (or effective) to treat this type of infection.

While lab tests may be used to make sure you don't have another type of infection, there is no test needed to confirm the diagnosis of a viral sore throat. One exception to this is **mononucleosis** (a viral infection commonly referred to as "mono"), which often includes a sore throat and is diagnosed using a blood test.

## BACTERIAL PHARYNGITIS

While many throat infections are caused by viral organisms and resolve on their own with time, some throat infections are caused by bacteria, which can be treated with antibiotics. Examples of bacterial throat infections include **strep throat**, as well as sexually transmitted infections like gonorrhea and chlamydia of the throat.

Symptoms of a bacterial throat infection like strep throat include a sore throat, tender and enlarged glands in your neck, fever, and white patches on your tonsils in the back of your throat. It's less common to have a cough or runny nose with bacterial pharyngitis.

Bacterial pharyngitis (and/or tonsillitis, which refers to infection of the tonsils) is often diagnosed using a swab of the back of your throat. Rapid strep test results are often available the same day as your visit. If your rapid strep test is negative, a second test - called a throat culture - will also be sent to the lab. Throat cultures and other throat swabs (including tests for gonorrhea and chlamydia of the throat) are often back within 3-4 days after your visit.

## TREATMENT

If you've been diagnosed with a bacterial throat infection like strep throat, your clinician may prescribe an antibiotic. Please be sure to take all of your antibiotics according to the directions on your prescription.

If you've been diagnosed with viral pharyngitis, antibiotics are both ineffective and unnecessary, since your body will resolve this infection on its own over time.

Several things you can do to help to relieve discomfort and support your body as it recovers from both viral and bacterial pharyngitis:

- Get plenty of rest.
- Sip on warm, soothing beverages like warm tea with honey.
- Use salt water to soothe your throat: dissolve 1/2 teaspoon of salt into a glass of warm water, sip a small amount, gargle the salt water in the back of your throat, and then spit it out. Repeat as needed.
- Use ibuprofen (400mg every 4 to 6 hours as needed, taken with food) or acetaminophen (650mg every 6 hours as needed) for throat pain.
- Use throat lozenges, which are available over the counter at most pharmacies, and can also help to soothe a sore throat.

## PREVENTION

Since viral infections and strep throat are spread through direct contact with infected saliva droplets, washing your hands regularly can help to limit spread, particularly after coughing, sneezing, eating or preparing food.

Testing and treatment for strep among people without symptoms who have been in contact with someone else with strep throat, mononucleosis, and viral pharyngitis is not routinely recommended.

Gonorrhea and chlamydia throat infections are caused by penetrative sexual contact with the throat (oral sex), so if you've been diagnosed with this type of infection, it's important to let all sexual partners know so they can seek testing and treatment for themselves. Barrier use (condoms, dental dams) during all sexual activity - including oral sex - can help to prevent gonorrheal and chlamydia pharyngitis.

## WHEN TO SEEK FOLLOW UP CARE

Since strep throat infections can sometimes - though rarely - lead to additional complications, be on the lookout for the following symptoms, and if any appear, please seek care immediately:

- Inability to speak or swallow; excessive drooling
- Neck stiffness; difficulty opening your mouth
- Pain in your chest or difficulty breathing
- Rash