

Invasive group A streptococcal (iGAS) disease

Communicable Diseases Factsheet

What is iGAS?

Invasive group A streptococcal disease (iGAS) is caused by infection with group A *Streptococcus* (Strep A) bacteria. Strep A bacteria generally cause mild disease such as sore throats (strep throat) and skin sores (impetigo); however, it can also cause iGAS. iGAS is a severe disease which includes infection of the blood (sepsis), meningitis and pneumonia.

It may also cause other serious diseases including toxic shock syndrome, flesh-eating disease (necrotising fasciitis), and infection of the uterus (womb) in women who have recently given birth (maternal sepsis).

Outbreaks of iGAS can occur in residential aged care facilities, hospitals, and childcare centres.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms depend on which part of the body is infected, and include:

- Fevers
- Chills and/or sweats
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath and/or chest pain
- Headache and/or stiff neck
- Nausea and vomiting
- Red, warm, painful, and rapidly spreading skin infection which may have pus or ulceration.

Lower abdominal pain, bleeding, or bad-smelling discharge from the vagina can be symptoms of maternal sepsis.

You should seek medical care immediately if you have any of these symptoms.

How is it spread?

Strep A bacteria are usually spread from one person to another by sneezing, coughing, or kissing. It can also spread by direct contact with other people with Strep A bacteria on their skin.

Some people carry Strep A bacteria in their throat or on their skin and have no symptoms but can spread the disease.

Who is at risk?

People most at risk of iGAS include:

- People who have been in contact with someone with iGAS in the past 30 days
- The elderly and infants
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people
- People who inject drugs
- People who are immunosuppressed (for example those on steroids or chemotherapy) or have a chronic disease (such as diabetes).

Damaged skin, for example cuts, insect bites, burns, or surgical procedures, increases the risk of iGAS.

Those who live in houses that are overcrowded or do not have hot water and/or working taps are also more at risk of infection as Strep A bacteria are more likely to spread.

How is it prevented?

You can stop getting or spreading Strep A bacteria by washing your hands with soap and water often. Keep wounds clean and covered until they heal.

People who have been in contact with a person who has had iGAS within the last 30 days, and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should see a doctor if they have a sore throat or skin sores, so that these can be treated and prevent iGAS.

If a newborn baby or their mother has iGAS, the other should also be given antibiotics to prevent the disease.

How is it diagnosed?

A doctor will examine the patient and take blood or other samples from the patient for testing to detect Strep A bacteria.

How is it treated?

Antibiotics are used to treat iGAS infections. A person should isolate until they have completed their first day of treatment to prevent spreading Strep A bacteria to others.

What is the public health response?

iGAS is a notifiable condition. Laboratories are required to notify cases to their local public health unit (PHU).

Institutions such as residential aged care facilities, hospitals and childcare centres should contact their local PHU if they are aware of two or more iGAS cases in residents or attendees of their facility within a 3-month period.

For further information please call your local public health unit on 1300 066 055 or visit the New South Wales Health website www.health.nsw.gov.au