

# THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT PHARYNGITIS

## What is pharyngitis?

- Pharyngitis indicates inflammation of the throat.
- Patients with pharyngitis seek medical attention because of a sore throat.
- Depending on the cause, patients may have other symptoms, such as fever, headache, runny nose, cough, hoarseness, and rash.

## What causes it?

- Viruses, such as the common cold, influenza (flu), and infectious mononucleosis (mono), account for most cases of pharyngitis.
- Strep throat, caused by the group A *Streptococcus* bacteria, is the most common treatable cause of pharyngitis.
- Besides infections, cigarette smoking, allergies, dry air, and excessive coughing or yelling can also cause pharyngitis.

## How is it treated?

- Most cases of pharyngitis, especially those caused by viruses, are treatable with rest; drinking plenty of fluids; and over-the-counter pain medicine, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen.
- Products, such as sprays, rinses, and lozenges, as well as salt water gargling, may also relieve the discomfort often associated with pharyngitis.
- Pharyngitis caused by strep throat is treated with an antibiotic.
- Pharyngitis caused by a virus does not respond to antibiotics.



## What are common complications?

- Most cases of pharyngitis, especially those caused by viruses, resolve spontaneously and have no complications.
- Possible complications of strep throat include a throat abscess and infections of the tonsils, ears, lymph nodes, and sinuses.
- If strep throat goes untreated for longer than a week, patients are at risk for rheumatic fever, which can cause swollen, painful joints and heart damage. This complication is now rare in the U.S.

## How can pharyngitis and its complications be prevented?

- In patients with strep throat, timely diagnosis and completion of the entire course of the antibiotic is very effective in preventing complications.

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## For More Information

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[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/sorethroat.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/sorethroat.html)  
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