

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT PHARYNGITIS

In the Clinic
Annals of Internal Medicine

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.

For More Information

ACP[®]
AMERICAN COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS
INTERNAL MEDICINE | Doctors for Adults

www.cdc.gov/getsmart/antibiotic-use/URI/sore-throat.html
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/sorethroat.html
National Institutes of Health
<http://jama.ama-assn.org/content/291/13/1664.full.pdf>
American Medical Association
<http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseases-conditions/sore-throat.printerview.all.html>
American Academy of Family Physicians