Disease/Medical Condition

STREP THROAT

(also know as “streptococcal sore throat”, “strept pharyngitis”, and “strep tonsillitis”; caused by Group A [beta-haemolytic] streptococci bacteria [GAS])

Date of Publication: March 11, 2013

Is the initiation of non-invasive dental hygiene procedures* contra-indicated? Yes

- Is medical consult advised? Yes, if the patient/client has suspected or laboratory-confirmed strep throat or is otherwise unwell with oral manifestations and related signs and symptoms. Refer to primary care provider (e.g., physician or nurse practitioner) for follow-up and definitive diagnosis (e.g., throat swab and culture or rapid strep test). Instruct patient/client to reschedule dental hygiene appointment when s/he feels well AND when antibiotic therapy has been initiated for at least 24 hours if strep throat has been diagnosed. If there is a patient/client history of rheumatic fever (now rare in developed countries), it is most prudent to wait until the course of antibiotic treatment has been completed. Antibiotic regimens – such as penicillin V and most alternatives – typically require a 10-day course to achieve successful treatment and prevent post-streptococcal complications. A notable exception is azithromycin which, given its long half-life, requires only 5 days of therapy.

Is medical consult advised? Yes; see above.

Is medical clearance required? Yes

Is antibiotic prophylaxis required? No

Is postponing treatment advised? Yes (until patient/client has been on an antibiotic regimen for at least 24 hours)

Oral management implications

- Mode of transmission is most commonly via large respiratory droplets or direct contact with patients/clients or carriers, and rarely via direct contact with objects. Outbreaks of strep throat may occur via ingestion of contaminated food; contamination of milk or egg products by humans appears to be the most important source of foodborne episodes.

- In untreated, uncomplicated cases, the period of communicability is typically 10–21 days. With adequate penicillin treatment, transmissibility usually ends within 24 hours. Persons with untreated strep throat may carry the bacteria for weeks to months; contagiousness of these persons decreases sharply in 2–3 weeks after the onset of infection.

- In cases of laboratory confirmed or suspected strep throat, delay elective treatment until the signs and symptoms of strep throat have subsided and antibiotic therapy has been initiated for at least 24 hours and preferably for the full duration of the prescription (typically 10 days).

- Spread of GAS infection can be reduced by good hand washing, especially after coughing and sneezing.

Oral manifestations

- Red and swollen tonsils, often with white patches (exudate) or streaks of pus (purulent discharge)

- Red spots (petechiae) on the soft and/or hard palate

- Throat pain and difficulty swallowing

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Related signs and symptoms

- Fever; swollen, tender lymph nodes in the neck; headache; rash; abdominal pain (especially in young children, and sometimes accompanied by vomiting); fatigue.
- Some people may carry GAS in the throat or on the skin and have no symptoms of illness. Most GAS infections are relatively mild illnesses such as strep throat or impetigo. Severe, sometimes life-threatening, GAS infections occasionally occur when bacteria spread to the blood, muscles, or lungs.
- Sick persons, such as those who have strep throat or impetigo, are most likely to spread the infection. Persons who carry the bacteria but are asymptomatic are much less contagious.

References and sources of more detailed information

- US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/groupastreptococcal_g.htm
- Canadian Paediatric Society, Caring for Kids http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/strep_throat

* Includes oral hygiene instruction, fitting a mouth guard, taking an impression, etc.

** Ontario Regulation 501/07 made under the Dental Hygiene Act, 1991. Invasive dental hygiene procedures are scaling teeth and root planing, including curetting surrounding tissue.

Date: December 10, 2012