

Sore Throat

Overview

Everyone experiences sore throats when they have a cold or flu. But there are other reasons for sore throats that may be symptomatic of more serious problems.

Strep Throat

Strep throat is caused by streptococcal bacteria (strep) in the throat and often the tonsils. Symptoms include sudden severe sore throat, pain swallowing, a fever over 101°F, swollen tonsils and lymph nodes, and white or yellow

spots on a reddened back of the throat. Strep throat is highly contagious, with a two-to-five day incubation period. It can be diagnosed through a physical examination and a throat culture. Strep throat is treated with antibiotics and usually resolves in three to seven days, although the healing time can be up to two weeks. It is important to have strep throat diagnosed and begin treatment as soon as possible in order to prevent its spread to others.



Inflamed Tonsils and Adenoids

Tonsillitis is an inflammation of the tonsils located in the back of the throat on both sides of the tongue. Tonsils are part of the body's natural immune system. This tissue captures bacteria and viruses to either prevent them from entering the body or trigger the appropriate immune response. The back of the throat may appear red or swollen or have a white or yellow coating covering the tonsils. The adenoids (tissue high in the throat behind the nose and soft palate) may also be inflamed and swollen, impeding swallowing and/or breathing. Symptoms include a severe sore throat, painful or difficult swallowing, coughing, headache, fever, chills and swelling of the cheeks and neck. Tonsillitis may also be caused by strep throat. Antibiotic medication is generally prescribed to treat the inflammation (usually penicillin). Tonsillitis usually resolves in four to seven days if caused by a virus. Chronic cases of repeated tonsillitis may require surgical removal of the tonsils and/or adenoids (tonsillectomy and adenoidectomy). An adenoidectomy may also be recommended for children experiencing chronic ear infections.

Laryngitis

The larynx allows air to pass in and out of the lungs while preventing solids (food) and liquids from entering the lungs. The larynx also contributes to sound production by the vocal cords. Laryngitis is an inflammation of the larynx, the top portion of the windpipe (trachea). It is characterized by hoarseness, coughing, difficulty in breathing for some children and, occasionally, loss of voice. In addition to an infection, laryngitis may be caused by acid reflux or nodules, polyps or nerve damage on the vocal cords. Laryngitis usually heals by itself within two weeks with the help of increased air moisture, drinking plenty of fluids and resting the voice.

Pharyngitis

The pharynx is tissue that resides behind the mouth and soft palate and acts as a pathway for food and liquids to enter the esophagus and air to enter the lungs. An inflammation of the pharynx is called pharyngitis. Painful swallowing is the most common symptom. Pharyngitis may also occur along with laryngitis. Again, the inflammation usually heals by itself with rest, fluids and air humidity.

Epiglottitis

The epiglottis is a flap of tissue at the base of the tongue that keeps food from going into the windpipe when swallowing. Epiglottitis occurs when this tissue becomes inflamed and infected. The swelling of the epiglottis can block the tongue and result in a medical emergency. In addition to infections, epiglottitis can be caused by chemicals (illicit drugs), severe heat damage (thermal epiglottitis) or trauma. If you experience a sore throat that hampers your ability to swallow, seek immediate medical attention.

If you have a sore throat that causes pain or won't heal, please contact our office and schedule an appointment with one of our otolaryngologists.