

INVASIVE GROUP A STREPTOCOCCAL DISEASE (IGAS)

What is iGAS?

iGAS is a serious bacterial infection caused by Group A streptococcus (GAS) bacteria. There are many different strains of GAS bacteria, which most often cause mild illnesses such as “strep throat” or impetigo. Some people can have GAS bacteria on their skin or in their throat without getting sick (referred to as colonized). However, the bacteria can invade other parts of the body causing invasive disease which can result in severe, life threatening conditions, such as:

- Necrotizing fasciitis, also known as “flesh-eating disease” (destruction of skin and fat tissue)
- Myositis (destruction of muscle tissue)
- Meningitis (inflammation of the membranes covering the brain)
- Streptococcal toxic shock syndrome (STSS), a life-threatening condition that causes low blood pressure and failure of multiple organs

Who can get iGAS?

Anyone can get iGAS. It is spread through direct contact with an infected person’s wound or fluids from an infected person’s nose or throat (e.g. through coughing or sneezing).

Those whose ability to fight off infections is decreased because of chronic illness or an illness that affects the immune system, those living in crowded environments, those who inject drugs, and those who have open wounds (e.g. cuts, burns, open sores, chickenpox infection) are at more risk.

Spread of GAS among residents in long term care facilities have been associated with the following:

- Having a roommate who is infected or colonized with GAS
- Being cared for by the same health care provider as a resident who is infected or colonized with GAS
- Residing on the same unit as a resident who is infected or colonized with GAS

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms depend on the type of condition that someone with iGAS develops. Early symptoms of iGAS may include:

- Fever or chills
- Tiredness
- Severe pain, redness or swelling in the joints or muscles (redness may spread)
- Headache, stiff neck, sensitivity to lights, or confusion
- Dizziness, nausea, or vomiting
- Rapid breathing or shortness of breath

What is the treatment?

Antibiotics are used to treat iGAS. Early medical treatment and surgical intervention when needed is important in reducing risk of severe complications or death.

How can you prevent iGAS infection?

- Practice good hand hygiene by washing hands with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer after coughing, sneezing, as well as before and after touching a wound.
- Practice good respiratory etiquette by turning your head away from others and covering your nose and mouth with a tissue or elbow when coughing or sneezing.
- Maintain healthy habits including reducing contact with secretions from other peoples' nose and mouth (e.g. avoid sharing personal items such as drinking glasses)
- Keep wounds clean and monitor for signs of infection (redness, swelling, pain, or discharge).
- Reduce overcrowding in living quarters.
- Stay up to date on varicella (chickenpox) vaccination. iGAS infection risk is higher following recent infection. See [Nova Scotia's Routine Immunization Schedule](#).

What if you have been in close contact with a person who has iGAS?

If you have been identified by Public Health as a close contact of a person who has iGAS you may be offered antibiotics to reduce the risk of developing disease and/or spreading the disease to others. Not all close contacts need antibiotics. Follow Public Health's advice and monitor for symptoms. If symptoms develop seek care immediately at your local emergency department or call 911.