



## **Invasive Group A streptococcus (iGAS) Questions and Answers for Close Contacts**

**You have been identified as being a close contact of an individual who has an infection called invasive Group A Streptococcus (iGAS).**

**Please contact a public health nurse at 807-625-8318 as soon as possible to discuss the risk to you. You may need preventive antibiotics.**

**Group A Streptococcus can infect a person in different ways. There are common forms of infection (less serious) and there are invasive forms of infection (less common, more serious).**

Group A Streptococcus (GAS) is a germ (bacteria) often found in the nose and throat, or on the skin. Some people who get GAS will not experience any major symptoms, some will experience common infections such as sore (strep) throat or skin infections (e.g. impetigo), and a few will experience serious invasive disease (see below).

You can become infected with GAS bacteria if an infected person coughs or sneezes on you, or if you touch their contaminated hands, wounds, or sores and then touch your own eyes, nose, mouth, or open wounds. Those who are ill with GAS are the most likely to spread it to others. People who carry the bacteria but have no symptoms are much less contagious. Once an infected person has been treated with an antibiotic for 24 hours they usually can no longer spread the bacteria.

### **What is “invasive” GAS?**

GAS is sometimes found in unusual places such as blood, fluid surrounding the brain and spinal cord, or in the lining of muscles and joints. GAS found in these unusual places is called “**invasive disease**” (iGAS) and can result in **severe** iGAS disease.

### **What are the signs and symptoms of severe iGAS?**

Symptoms that may indicate **severe** invasive GAS include:

- Necrotizing fasciitis (“flesh eating” disease) and myositis:
  - Deep infection of tissue: fever, severe pain, swelling and/or redness of part of the body
- Meningitis:
  - fever, severe pain on movement of the neck, nausea, and/or vomiting;
- Streptococcal toxic shock syndrome:
  - fever, a general feeling of being unwell, dizziness, confusion and/or a flat, red rash on the body that may peel.
  - low blood pressure, poor blood clotting, liver, kidney or lung impairment.

### **Am I at risk of developing iGAS?**

Close contacts of people with iGAS **may** be at increased risk of infection. However, the risk of invasive disease is low for most people. People with chronic illnesses are at greater risk for invasive disease.

Close contacts include:

- People living in the same household as the sick person;
- People sharing sleeping arrangements with the sick person;
- People who have had direct contact with the sick person through mouth to mouth resuscitation, open mouth kissing, and open skin sores;
- Injection drug users who shared needles with the sick person.

School classmates (kindergarten and older), work colleagues, as well as social or sports contacts of the sick person **are not usually** considered to be close contacts.

### **How can iGAS be prevented?**

The best way to prevent iGAS is to avoid becoming infected in the first place. Carefully washing your hands and avoiding the secretions of ill people will help to prevent infection.

**Antibiotics are recommended for close contacts of someone with severe iGAS disease to prevent them from getting infected.** In certain situations, close contacts of people with non-severe iGAS may also receive preventive antibiotics. A Public Health nurse will speak with you and determine if you need to see your doctor to start on a course of preventive antibiotics.

If you choose not to take preventive antibiotics, pay close attention to your health for one month after your last contact with a person with invasive GAS. If you develop an illness with fever or any symptoms of **severe** invasive GAS (see above), seek immediate medical advice. Tell the doctor that you have been in close contact with someone recently diagnosed with invasive GAS disease and that you have developed symptoms that you are worried about.

**For Further Information Contact the Infectious Disease Program at  
625-8318 or toll free 1-888-294-6630, ext. 8318.**

