



Central Office: 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield, CT 06109 Phone (860) 721-2822 Fax (860) 721-2823  
Berlin: 240 Kensington Road, Berlin, CT 06037 Phone (860) 828-7017 Fax (860) 828-9248  
Newington: 131 Cedar Street, Newington, CT 06111 Phone (860) 665-8586 Fax (860) 665-8533  
Rocky Hill: 761 Old Main Street, Rocky Hill, CT 06067 Phone (860) 258-2770 Fax (860) 258-2767  
[www.ccthd.org](http://www.ccthd.org)

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## Don't Let Strep Throat Keep You from Fall Festivities

You wake up one morning from a full night's sleep and you can't help but notice that your throat feels like it is on fire. Drinking a tall glass of water, brushing your teeth, even the normal morning cup of coffee will not quench the burning inferno in your throat. Upon looking in the mirror, you discover little white spots coating the back of your throat and find that it is painful to swallow. This season, don't let strep throat keep you from your fall festivities.

Strep throat is an infection in the throat and tonsils caused by Group A *streptococcus* bacteria (called "Group A strep"). This bacterium causes an infection which usually affects children ages 5 years to 15 years, but can happen to anyone. The bacterium usually lives in the nose and throat and is generally spread through contact with droplets from an infected cough or sneeze. Strep throat can also be caused by a variety of different factors, including allergens; environmental irritants, such as cigarette smoke; and chronic post nasal drip.

Symptoms of strep throat usually occur 2 to 5 days after coming into contact with an individual who is sick and can be mild or severe. These symptoms may include sore throat, which usually starts quickly; severe pain when swallowing; fever (101 degrees F and above); red, swollen tonsils that may have white patches or streaks of pus; tiny red spots on the back of the palette, headache, nausea, vomiting, swollen lymph nodes, body aches and rash.

Treatments for strep throat can vary, but many helpful remedies include the following:

- Drink warm liquids, such as lemon tea or tea with honey
- Gargle several times a day with warm salt water (1 teaspoon of salt in 1 cup water)
- Drink cold liquids or suck on frozen popsicles
- Suck on hard candies or throat lozenges
- A cool mist vaporizer or humidifier
- Over the counter medications, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol)

It is important to note that strep throat must be confirmed through a test at your physician's office. Many people think that just looking at the appearance of the throat is enough to diagnose, but it is not. Once tested positive, your physician may give you antibiotics, which can reduce the length of time you are sick and reduce symptoms. Antibiotics can also prevent the spread of germs to family and friends.

People with confirmed cases of strep throat should stay home from work, school or daycare until they have taken antibiotics for at least 24 hours. As always, the best method of prevention is to wash hands with warm water and soap for 20 seconds, or the length of time for two rounds of "happy birthday". Be sure to avoid sharing cups, utensils and personal hygiene items, and always cover coughs and sneezes with the inside of the elbow.

For more information about strep throat or any other public health issues, please contact the Central Connecticut Health District, serving the towns of Berlin, Newington, Rocky Hill and Wethersfield at [www.ccthd.org](http://www.ccthd.org) or by calling (860) 721-2822.