

Sore Throat

What are the symptoms of sore throat?

When a child complains of a sore throat it is usually one of many symptoms associated with an illness. The tonsils may be enlarged and redder than normal. Children too young to talk may refuse to eat or drink or they may cry during feedings.

What are the causes of sore throat?

Most sore throats are associated with a viral infection and will last 3 to 5 days. These sore throats will be accompanied by a runny, stuffy nose and cough and are caused by drainage and postnasal drip. They are worse in the morning and tend to get better during the day. This pattern occurs particularly if your child is a mouth breather because the throat can become dry and uncomfortable during the night. Viral infections do not respond to an antibiotic.

Strep throat is caused by streptococcal bacteria and is usually accompanied by a fever. In addition, children may complain of a headache or stomachache and may even vomit. If you think your child has strep throat it is not urgent, but we will need to examine them in the office within 24 to 48 hours to see if a rapid strep test is indicated. These tests are done in 5 minutes and are very accurate. Occasionally, we may need to follow up the rapid strep test with a culture sent to the hospital lab. Treatment of streptococcal infection with an antibiotic may be done within 7 days to prevent complications.

How to treat a sore throat at home

You can care for most sore throats accompanied by a cold (a viral infection) at home. It may be helpful to have the child sip warm fluids such as chicken soup, which can be very soothing and tend to loosen secretions to make the child more comfortable. Children over the age of 4 can suck on hard candy or lollipops. Throat sprays tend not to be much more effective than hard candy and have medication in them which can cause side effects. Older children may find relief with gargling with warm, dilute salt water. You can give your child acetaminophen or ibuprofen for pain relief or for a fever over 102 degrees. If your child is very congested or is a mouth breather at night, it may help to use a cool bedside humidifier.

When to call our office

You should call our office for an appointment if the sore throat lasts more than 3 to 5 days, is accompanied by high fever, or anytime you have any concern about your child. If you believe your child has strep throat we should examine them in the office within 24 to 48 hours.

In addition if the child has the following symptoms we should see them immediately:

- Is unable to swallow
- Is having difficulty breathing
- Is acting very ill