

Common Cold Or Strep?

(NAPSA)—Fever, runny nose, sore throat and cough—these are some of the symptoms that you may experience during cold and flu season. However, when is a scratchy throat just an annoying side effect of the common cold or a sign of a more serious illness, such as strep throat?

It is estimated that 80 percent of sore throats are caused by viruses, and 10 to 20 percent are caused by *Streptococcus*, the bacterium that causes strep throat. A respiratory infection, such as strep, spreads easily when people are in close contact with one another, such as in an office setting or a college dormitory. However, strep is more commonly seen in children between 5 and 11 years of age.

“Anytime your child has persistent sore throat, even if they do not have other symptoms like a runny nose or fever, you should call your pediatrician,” said Kelley Taylor, MD, FCAP, a pathologist from Atlanta, Ga. “If left untreated, strep can develop into a more serious—and sometime life-threatening condition, such as rheumatic fever or kidney failure.”

Symptoms of strep throat can vary depending on a child’s age and are similar to those of the common cold. Some of the common symptoms, according to the National Institute of Health, include:

- Sore throat
- Fever
- Difficulty swallowing
- Fussiness
- Lack of appetite
- Swollen glands

If a sore throat is accompanied with a rash or if a child has difficulty breathing or extreme trouble swallowing, this could indicate a more serious illness and immediate medical attention is required.

“It’s difficult to definitively diagnose whether a person has a virus or strep throat simply by examin-



ing the patient,” said Dr. Taylor, a physician who diagnoses patients with illness such as strep throat through laboratory medicine. “That’s why it’s important for patients to visit their physician and receive the proper testing so that a positive diagnosis can be made.”

If strep throat is suspected, a physician or other medical care provider will perform a throat culture by swabbing a patient’s tonsils and back of the throat. The smear is then dipped into a special culture dish that allows the strep bacteria to grow. Then, the test is processed in a laboratory and requires about 24-hours to produce results. Some medical care providers will perform a rapid strep test, which provides results within minutes. While this test can provide patients with a positive result quickly, a negative test needs to be confirmed with the 24-hour culture.

People with strep throat should receive antibiotics in case it is one of the dangerous strains of strep throat that can go on to damage organs. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention states that it is important for a person with strep to complete the entire prescription of antibiotics—even after the symptoms are gone.

For more information, about how to prevent disease, visit the College of American Pathologists at www.cap.org.