Strep Throat/Scarlet Fever

What is strep throat?
Strep throat is an infection caused by bacteria called group A streptococcus. It is more common in children than in adults. Strep throat is easily spread when an infected person coughs or sneezes contaminated droplets into the air and another person inhales them. A person can also become infected from touching these secretions (on toys, cups and other surfaces) and then touching his mouth or nose.

What are the symptoms?
Symptoms of strep throat infection may include throat pain, fever, headache, swollen glands, abdominal pain and sometimes vomiting. Strep infections can lead to scarlet fever, which is characterized by a bright red, rough textured rash that spreads all over the body. It can also lead to Rheumatic Fever.

The incubation period (time from exposure to infection) is usually one to five days.

How is strep throat treated?
A health care provider can diagnose the illness by using a throat culture or test. An antibiotic medicine is usually prescribed to prevent complications (such as Rheumatic Fever).

How can strep throat be prevented?
Everyone should cover their mouths and noses when sneezing or coughing. Children should be taught to do this as well. Careful hand washing, especially after coughing or sneezing, is very important. Avoid sharing eating utensils and drinking glasses.

What should I do if I think a child has strep throat?
If you suspect a case of strep throat or scarlet fever in your childcare facility or school:
•Call the parent(s) to pick up the child and have him evaluated by a health care professional. Remember, a throat culture is the only way to rule out or confirm strep infection.
•Request that the parents inform you if the child is diagnosed with strep infection so that you can carefully observe the other children for symptoms. Notify other parents to closely observe their children if there are several cases in a classroom.
•A child diagnosed with strep infection may return to childcare or school 24 hours after starting antibiotic therapy and if he has had no fever for 24 hours. The school-age child should also feel well enough to do his homework.
•All antibiotic medicine should be taken even though the child is feeling better. Taking all of the medicine will help ensure the infection is gone.

For more information, call the Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health at (336) 641-7777 or visit our website at www.guilfordcountync.gov

Free language assistance is available upon request.