

New Release  
Community Health Resource Center  
General Leonard Wood Army Community Hospital

## Know the Facts-How to Avoid Strep Infection

Streptococcus is a bacteria often found in the throat and on the skin. People carry strep in the throat or on the skin but do not necessarily have symptoms of illness. Most strep infections are relatively mild illnesses such as "strep throat," or impetigo. On rare occasions, these bacteria can cause other severe and even life-threatening diseases.

Strep infections may have a range of symptoms:

- No illness
- Mild illness (Strep throat or skin infection such as impetigo)
- Severe illness (necrotizing fasciitis, streptococcal toxic shock syndrome)

Severe and sometimes life-threatening Strep disease may occur when bacteria get into parts of the body where bacteria usually are not found such as in the blood, muscle or the lungs. These infections are termed "invasive Strep disease."

Invasive Strep infections occur when the bacteria get past the person's defenses. This may occur when someone has sores or other breaks in the skin that allow the bacteria to get into the tissue, or when the person's ability to fight off the infection is lowered.

According to LTC Jeffrey Leggit, GLWACH's Deputy Commander for Clinical Services, Fort Leonard Wood has seen a recent increase in the number of invasive strep cases. "However, this does not pose a threat to the installation or surrounding community. The Soldiers that were affected have been in intensive training and were therefore more susceptible to developing complications from Strep."

Few people who come in contact with Strep will develop invasive Strep disease. Most people will have a throat or skin infection, and some may have no symptoms at all.

The bacteria are spread through direct contact with mucus from the nose or throat of people who are infected or through contact with infected wounds or sores on the skin. It is not likely that household items like plates, cups, or toys spread these bacteria.

### **What can be done to help prevent streptococcal infections?**

The spread of Strep infection can be reduced by good hand washing, especially after coughing and sneezing and before preparing foods or eating. Anyone with a sore throat should be seen by a health care provider who can perform tests to find out whether the illness is strep throat. All wounds should be kept clean and watched for possible signs of infection such as redness, swelling, drainage and pain at the wound site. Anyone with signs of an infected wound, especially if fever occurs, should seek medical care.

According to MAJ Tammy Mayer, Chief, Public Health Nursing at GLWACH, “Hand washing, when done correctly, is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of disease.” Hand washing should be done:

1. before eating and after using the latrine
2. before touching the eyes, nose or mouth
3. after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
4. before and after touching a cut or abrasion
5. after touching or shaking hands with someone who is ill

Proper hand washing technique includes the following steps:

1. Wet your hands with warm running water.
2. Add soap, then rub your hands together, making a soapy lather. Do this away from the running water for at least 15 seconds, being careful not to wash the lather away. Wash the front and back of your hands, as well as between your fingers and under your nails.
3. Rinse your hands well under warm running water. Let the water run back into the sink, not down to your elbows.
4. Dry hands thoroughly with a clean towel. Do not share towels.

For more information, please visit the following web site: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or you may call the Community Health Resource Center at 596-0491.