What is Sore Throat?

A sore throat is pain, scratchiness or irritation of the throat that often worsens when you swallow.

Causes of a Sore Throat

- Most sore throats are caused by viruses, like ones that cause a cold or the flu
- Some sore throats, like strep throat, are caused by bacteria
- Other causes include:
  - Allergies
  - Dry air
  - Pollution (airborne chemicals or irritants)
  - Smoking or exposure to second hand smoke
  - Gastroesophageal reflux
  - Muscle strain from yelling or talking

Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms of a sore throat may vary depending on the cause. Signs and symptoms may include:

- Pain or a scratchy sensation in the throat
- Pain that worsens with swallowing or talking
- Difficulty swallowing
- Dry throat
- Sore, swollen glands in your neck or jaw
- Swollen, red tonsils
- White patches or pus on your tonsils
- Hoarse or muffled voice

See a Healthcare Provider if you have:

- A sore throat that is severe or lasts longer than a week
- Difficulty swallowing
- Difficulty breathing
- Difficulty opening your mouth
- Joint pain
- Earache
- Rash
- Fever higher than 101 F (38.3 C)
- Blood in saliva or phlegm
- Frequently recurring sore throats
- A lump in your neck
- Hoarseness lasting more than two weeks
Antibiotics are Needed When...

Antibiotics are needed if a healthcare provider diagnoses you with strep throat, which is caused by bacteria. Strep throat cannot be diagnosed by looking in the throat – a lab test must also be done. Antibiotics are prescribed for strep throat for the purpose of preventing rheumatic fever. If the test result shows strep throat, the infected patient should stay home from work, school, or day care until 24 hours after starting an antibiotic. A healthcare provider may prescribe other medicine or give you tips to help with other symptoms like fever and cough, but antibiotics are not needed to treat most sore throats.

Antibiotics Will Not Help if...

When a sore throat is caused by a virus or irritation from the air, antibiotic treatment will not help it get better. Most sore throats will improve on their own within 1-2 weeks. It is important to take antibiotics only when they are needed. Taking antibiotics when they are not needed can be harmful. Each time you take an antibiotic, the bacteria that normally live in the body (on the skin, in the intestine, in the mouth and nose, etc.) are more likely to become resistant to antibiotics. Common antibiotics cannot kill infections caused by these resistant germs.

How to Feel Better

Regardless of the cause of your sore throat, at-home care strategies usually provide temporary relief. Try these strategies:

- **Rest.** Get plenty of sleep and rest your voice.
- **Drink fluids.** Drink plenty of water to keep the throat moist and prevent dehydration.
- **Try comforting foods and beverage.** Warm liquids — broth, caffeine-free tea or warm water with honey — and cold treats such as ice pops can soothe a sore throat.
- **Gargle saltwater.** A saltwater gargle of 1 teaspoon of table salt to 8 ounces of warm water can help soothe a sore throat. Gargle the solution and then spit it out.
- **Humidify the air.** Use a cool-air humidifier to eliminate dry air that may further irritate a sore throat or sit for several minutes in a steamy bathroom.
- **Consider lozenges.** Lozenges can soothe a sore throat.
- **Avoid irritants.** Keep your home free from cigarette smoke and cleaning products that can irritate the throat.
- **Treat pain and fever.** Ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin IB, others) or acetaminophen (Tylenol, others) may minimize throat pain.

Preventing a Sore Throat

- **Wash your hands** thoroughly and frequently
- **Avoid sharing** food, drinking glasses or utensils.
- **Cough or sneeze** into a tissue and throw it away. When necessary, sneeze into your elbow.
- **Use alcohol-based hand sanitizers** as an alternative to hand-washing when soap and water aren’t available.
- **Avoid touching** public phones or drinking fountains with your mouth.
- **Regularly clean** telephones, TV remotes and computer keyboards with sanitizing cleanser.
- **Avoid close contact** with people who are sick.
- **If you smoke, quit.** Avoid exposure to secondhand smoke.
- **Humidify your home** if the air is dry.

If symptoms do not improve in 72 hours or worsen, please call or return to health services. If your condition becomes urgent after business hours,

- Contact security 724-852-3303 and/or your Resident Director
- MedExpress Urgent Care is open 7 days a week 8am-8pm
  - Phone number: (724) 852-6391
- Washington Health System Greene Emergency Department is open 24 hours

For more information and facts on this sheet:
