

Possible Increases in Group A Streptococcal Infections

DATE:	12/16/2022
TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Denise A. Johnson, M.D., FACOG, FACHE, Acting Secretary of Health
SUBJECT:	Possible Increases in Group A Streptococcal Infections
DISTRIBUTION:	Statewide
LOCATION:	n/a
STREET ADDRESS:	n/a
COUNTY:	n/a
MUNICIPALITY:	n/a
ZIP CODE:	n/a

This transmission is a “Health Advisory” and provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

HOSPITALS: PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, PEDIATRIC, NURSING AND LABORATORY STAFF IN YOUR HOSPITAL; **EMS COUNCILS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; **FQHCs:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE **LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTIONS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; **PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP; **LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES:** PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, INFECTION CONTROL, AND NURSING STAFF IN YOUR FACILITY

- It is important for providers to recognize Group A Streptococcal (GAS) infections early, especially among patients at high risk for severe illness.
- Facilities with patients at high risk for severe disease, including long-term care should regularly review Pennsylvania Department of Health’s (DOH) recommendations and public health professional resources: [Invasive Group A Streptococcus \(iGAS\) Toolkit](#).
- Consider obtaining culture for suspected invasive infection (iGAS), including cultures of abscesses, other infected sites, and blood cultures as clinically indicated.
- Review guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics on alternative treatments due to an **amoxicillin suspensions** shortage in the U.S: [Amoxicillin Shortage: Antibiotic Options for Common Pediatric Conditions](#).
- Laboratories should hold iGAS isolates obtained from children (<18 years of age) or send them to Pennsylvania’s state public health laboratory for temporary storage.
- Report cases of iGAS to DOH through Pennsylvania’s electronic disease surveillance system, PA-NEDSS.
- Notify DOH at 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258) or your local health department as soon as possible about unusually aggressive iGAS infections among children or potential increases or clusters of iGAS infections.

BACKGROUND

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is looking into a possible increase in invasive Group A streptococcal (iGAS) infections among children in the United States ([Possible](#)

[Increase in Invasive Group A Strep Infections, 2022](#)). Invasive Group A *Streptococcus*, defined as GAS isolated from a sterile body site (e.g., blood, CSF, pleural fluid, bone, joint, muscle), streptococcal toxic shock syndrome, or necrotizing fasciitis, is a reportable condition in Pennsylvania. At this time, Pennsylvania has not identified a significant increase in pediatric or adult cases compared to previous years. Diligent clinical assessment and diagnostic sampling of suspected iGAS patients is needed to decrease transmission and monitor iGAS incidence in Pennsylvania.

Group A streptococcal infections can cause a range of illness from mild or moderate in non-invasive cases (pharyngitis and skin and soft tissue infections) to severe, life-threatening disease with **invasive** infections (pneumonia, bacteremia, streptococcal toxic shock syndrome, and necrotizing fasciitis). Individuals at higher risk for severe iGAS disease include elderly or immunocompromised persons, persons with medical conditions including cardiac disease and diabetes, those with skin disease, trauma, surgical wounds, and injection drug use. GAS infections can spread rapidly in congregate settings including long-term care facilities, shelters for people who are experiencing homelessness, and others. Facilities with patients at high risk for severe disease, including long-term care, should regularly review DOH's recommendations and public health professional resources: [Invasive Group A Streptococcus \(iGAS\) Toolkit](#).

GUIDANCE FOR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

Healthcare providers should encourage parents to make sure their children are up to date with influenza and varicella vaccines, as these infections can increase risk for getting an iGAS infection.

Recognizing Group A *Streptococcus* (GAS) infections early can prevent further GAS transmission and disease among individuals at high risk for severe outcomes. Consider obtaining culture for suspected invasive infection (iGAS), including cultures of abscesses, other infected sites, and blood cultures as clinically indicated to determine cases early in the infection process. This allows for swift administration of treatment and implementation of Infection control and prevention strategies to prevent further transmission and infection.

There is a national shortage of amoxicillin suspensions that is anticipated to last several months. When choosing a pediatric treatment protocol for GAS infection consider the antibiotic availability when initiating treatment. There is guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) on alternative treatments: [Amoxicillin Shortage: Antibiotic Options for Common Pediatric Conditions](#).

GUIDANCE FOR LABORATORIES

Laboratories should temporarily store iGAS isolates obtained from children (<18 years of age) until further notice. Alternatively isolates can be sent to the PADOH Bureau of Laboratories (BOL) for temporary storage.

Facilities choosing to send isolates to BOL for storage should include the laboratory form located at: [BOL Micro Specimen Submission Form](#) with the Specific agent Suspected section labeled as "GAS isolate for storage." Isolates should be sent on blood agar plates or slants.

In some instances, additional testing at CDC's *Streptococcus* Laboratory might be indicated. All specimens being sent to CDC should be routed through the DOH Bureau of Laboratories. DOH staff will provide additional guidance to laboratories if testing at CDC is indicated.

REPORTING

As a result of its high morbidity and mortality, invasive GAS (iGAS) is reportable in Pennsylvania by laboratories and healthcare providers. Laboratories and healthcare providers are required to report cases of iGAS to DOH through Pennsylvania's electronic disease surveillance system, PA-NEDSS. Additionally, notify DOH at 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258) or your local health department as soon as possible about unusually aggressive iGAS infections among children or potential increases or clusters of iGAS infections. Unusually aggressive infections could include cases of necrotizing fasciitis or necrotizing pneumonia, streptococcal toxic shock syndrome (STSS), septic shock or cases requiring extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) support.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

PADOH:

- [Invasive Group A Streptococcus \(iGAS\) Toolkit](#)
- [Pharyngitis Fact sheet updated .docx \(pa.gov\)](#)
- [Invasive Group A Strep Fact Sheet](#)

CDC: [Group A Streptococcal \(GAS\) Disease](#)

CDC Alert: [Possible Increase in Invasive Group A Strep Infections, 2022](#)

AAP: [Amoxicillin Shortage: Antibiotic Options for Common Pediatric Conditions](#)

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

This information is current as of December 16, 2022, but may be modified in the future.
