

# Sore Throat

Sore throats are very common. You can have a mild case that clears up in a few days or a serious illness that requires medical attention. **How do you know if you have a mild or severe case of sore throat? How do you get a sore throat?** This brochure will outline the causes and types of sore throat, which will help you to care for your sore throat.

## 1. Sore throat caused by germs

Viruses and bacteria are germs that can cause a sore throat. These germs can be spread easily. That's why it is important to cover your mouth when sneezing or coughing to prevent germs from spreading. Washing your hands often will also lessen the chance of getting the germs that can lead to sore throat.

Most sore throats are caused by a virus and usually occurs when you have a cold. There is no cure for this type of sore throat and it does not need to be treated with antibiotics. You should just treat your sore throat while your body fights the virus. Gargle with warm salt water and take throat sprays or cough drops to relieve your throat.



**Strep throat** is caused by bacteria and can develop into a serious illness, such as rheumatic fever. It should be treated with an antibiotic. Adults with strep throat may have a sore throat, fever and swollen neck glands, and usually don't have a cough or runny nose. Children with strep throat have a sore throat and may have tummy pain or a rash with small spots.

To see if you have strep throat, your doctor may swipe a long cotton swab at the back of your throat to use for lab testing. If you have strep throat, you must take your medication for the entire length of time as prescribed by your doctor.

**Diphtheria** is a serious illness that begins with a fever and sore throat. It is not common in the U.S. due to a strict immunization program. Children are immunized against diphtheria beginning at the age of 2 months.

**Tonsillitis** is an illness that affects your tonsils. Symptoms include fever, sore throat, and difficulty swallowing. Your doctor may prescribe antibiotics to treat your tonsillitis. You do not need to get your tonsils removed unless you get tonsillitis often.

## **2. Sore throat not caused by germs**

Other common causes of sore throat include:

- Dry climate or dry air in the home - you can relieve a sore throat by using a humidifier at home.
- Throat irritation - avoid talking or yelling too much, and foods that irritate your throat.
- Smoking - cigarette smoke can irritate a smoker's throat and second hand smoke can also cause irritation.
- Allergies or sinus problems - if you have a sore throat and allergies/sinus problems, you may need to see an allergist or an ear/nose/throat (ENT) specialist.
- Gastric reflux - acid from your stomach may affect your throat and may cause dry cough. You can improve this with antacid medication and changes with lifestyle and diet.



## **3. Sore throat: sign of cancer**

In some cases a sore throat could be a sign of throat cancer, especially in a smoker. The symptoms of throat cancer are a sore throat, difficult or painful swallowing, and a change in the sound of the voice. Keep in mind that these symptoms may be caused by other unrelated and less serious health conditions. Tell your doctor if you have any of the above symptoms.

**CHARLES B. WANG COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER**

**王嘉廉社區醫療中心**

Website / 網址: [www.cbwchc.org](http://www.cbwchc.org)

**268 Canal Street,  
New York, NY 10013**

**136-26 37<sup>th</sup> Avenue, 2 & 4/F  
Flushing, NY 11354**

**125 Walker Street, 2/F  
New York, NY 10013**

Internal Medicine / 內科部  
(212) 379-6998  
Women's Health / 婦女健康部  
(212) 966-0228

Internal Medicine / 內科部  
OB/GYN / 婦產科部  
(718) 886-1200  
Pediatrics / 兒科部  
(718) 886-1222

Pediatrics & Adolescent  
Health / 兒科及青少年部  
(212) 226-3888  
Dental / 牙科部  
(212) 226-9339

**Health Education Department / 健康教育部 (212) 966-0461**

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