

# PHARYNGITIS (Sore Throat)

## TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

# 7.6

### DESCRIPTION

Inflammation and infection of the pharynx that can be caused by a variety of germs.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Sore throat
- Swallowing difficulty
- Tickle or “lump” in the throat
- Fever
- Swollen glands in the neck (sometimes)
- Throat may be red or covered with a whitish membrane (sometimes)
- Generalized body aches

### CAUSES

Viral infection (most common cause) or bacterial infection (such as streptococcus). The germs are spread by person-to-person contact. Rarely, there may be other causes, such as irritation.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Common cold, flu, or seasonal allergies
- Weak immune system due to illness or drugs
- Smoking or second-hand smoke
- Chronic illness, such as diabetes
- Close quarters, such as university residence halls.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Avoid close contact with anyone with a sore throat. Avoid second-hand smoke. Wash hands frequently. Maintain adequate rest and diet.

### EXPECTED OUTCOME

Most cases of viral infection clear up on their own in a week. Antibiotic drugs can successfully treat bacterial infections. Complications are rare.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Ear infection
- Airways may become blocked
- Abscess (pus-filled area of infection)
- Rheumatic fever, scarlet fever, or glomerulonephritis, if pharyngitis is caused by streptococcal bacteria and does not receive adequate antibiotic treatment.

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do an exam of the throat, ears, nose, neck, and lungs. Medical tests may include blood study and throat culture (from a swab of the throat), or rapid strep test to find the type of infection.
- Treatment will include self-care measures and antibiotic drugs for bacterial infections. Antibiotics will not help viral infections.
- To relieve the sore throat, gargle frequently with warm salt water (mix one-half teaspoon of salt in one cup of water).
- Wash hands often to help prevent the spread of germs to other family members. Avoid kissing or sharing cups or other utensils.

### MEDICATION

- For minor discomfort, you may use non-prescription drugs such as ibuprofen
- Nonprescription throat lozenges may help ease discomfort.
- Antibiotic drugs are usually prescribed for bacterial infection. Finish entire course of drugs even if symptoms improve.

### ACTIVITY

Return to normal activities as symptoms improve. A person can no longer spread the germs if they have taken the antibiotic drug for at least 24 hours.

### DIET

Drink plenty of fluids. If swallowing solid food is painful, try a liquid or soft diet for a few days.

### NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

- Breathing, swallowing difficulty or chest pain.
- Fever worsens or severe headache develops
- Thick mucus drainage from the nose.
- Cough that produces green, yellow, brown or bloody sputum.
- Skin rash.
- Dark urine.
- Chest pain, neck pain or stiffness.

## Student Health Center



## WWW.SIU.EDU/~SHC

This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.

## 618-453-3311

Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.