



RHEUMATIC FEVER

What is rheumatic fever?

Rheumatic fever is an immune response that occurs after a strep throat or scarlet fever infection that was not properly treated. Group A *Streptococcus* bacteria cause strep throat and scarlet fever. Since rheumatic fever is an immune response, it is not an infection that can be passed from person to person. However, those infected with strep throat or scarlet fever can spread infection before rheumatic fever develops.

Who gets rheumatic fever?

Anyone can get rheumatic fever, but it is most common in children aged 5 to 15 years. It is rare in adults and children younger than 3 years old.

How is rheumatic fever spread?

Rheumatic fever is spread mainly via respiratory droplets. Large, crowded gatherings can increase the risk of getting strep throat or scarlet fever, which can lead to rheumatic fever.

What are the symptoms of rheumatic fever?

Rheumatic fever symptoms include fever, pain in joints, symptoms of congestive heart failure (chest pain, shortness of breath, fast heartbeat), fatigue, uncontrollable body movements, painless nodules under the skin (rare), and a rash with pink rings and a clear center (rare). Rheumatic fever can also lead to a new heart murmur, an enlarged heart, and fluid around the heart.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms of rheumatic fever appear between one to five weeks after strep throat or scarlet fever infection.

Should an infected person be excluded from work or school?

A person with rheumatic fever does not need to be excluded from work or school. However, during the strep throat or scarlet fever infection, individuals should stay at home until they no longer have a fever and have taken antibiotics for at least 12 hours.

What is the treatment for rheumatic fever?

Rheumatic fever treatment focuses on managing inflammation and other symptoms. Fever-reducing and pain-reliever medicines can assist in reducing inflammation. Antibiotics are used to treat group A *Streptococcus* infections that cause rheumatic fever.



Frequently Asked Questions

What can a person or community do to prevent the spread of rheumatic fever?

The best way to keep from getting or spreading group A strep infections such as strep throat or scarlet fever is to wash your hands often, especially after coughing or sneezing, and before preparing foods or eating.

Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,

<https://www.cdc.gov/groupastrep/diseases-public/rheumatic-fever.html>