**Q: When should I go to the clinic if I have a sore throat?**

A: Most people do not need to see a health care provider about a sore throat. It usually gets better on its own in 2 to 3 days. But a sore throat can sometimes be serious.

Go to the clinic if:

- You have a fever of at least 101°F or 38.4°C
- Your throat pain is severe or does not start to improve within 5 to 7 days

Call 9-1-1 or go to the emergency room or urgent Care if you:

- Have trouble breathing
- Are drooling because you cannot swallow your saliva
- Have swelling of the neck or tongue
- Cannot move your neck or have trouble opening your mouth

**Q: What causes sore throat?**

A: A sore throat is usually caused by an infection. Two types of germs can cause it: viruses and bacteria. People who have a sore throat caused by a virus do not need to be seen at the clinic. People who have a sore throat caused by bacteria might need to be seen. They might have a type of infection called strep throat. Keep in mind only about 1 in 10 adults who seek medical care for sore throat have strep throat.

**Q: How can I tell if my sore throat is caused by a virus or strep throat?**

A: People who have a sore throat caused by a virus usually have other symptoms, such as:

- A runny nose
- A stuffed-up chest
- Itchy or red eyes
- Cough
- A raspy (hoarse) voice
- Pain in the roof of the mouth

People who have a sore throat caused by strep throat DO NOT usually have a cough, runny nose, or itchy or red eyes. But they might have:

- Severe throat pain
- Fever (temperature higher than 100.4°F or 38°C)
Swollen glands in the neck

If you think you have strep throat we can check you for it easily by running a swab (Q-Tip) along the back of your throat and testing it for the bacteria that cause strep throat.

**Q: Do I need antibiotics?**

**A:** If you have an infection caused by a virus, you DO NOT need antibiotics. But if you have strep throat, you should get antibiotics. Most people with strep throat get better without antibiotics, but doctors and nurses often prescribe them anyway. That’s because antibiotics can prevent problems sometimes caused by strep throat. Plus, antibiotics can reduce the symptoms of strep throat and prevent its spread to other people.

**Q: What can I do to feel better?**

**A:**

- Take an over the counter pain medicine such as Ibuprofen. This is good because it helps alleviate pain, reduce swelling, and bring your fever down.
- Suck on cough drops or hard candy.
- Gargle with salt water.

**Q: When can I go back to work or school?**

**A:** If you have strep throat, wait 1 day after starting antibiotics. By then you will be a lot less likely to spread the infection. If you do not have strep throat, you can go back as soon as you feel well.

**Q: What can I do to prevent getting a sore throat again?**

**A:** Wash your hands often with soap and water. It is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of infection. You can use an alcohol rub instead, but make sure the hand rub gets everywhere on your hands.