

# Tonsillitis in children

**This leaflet offers more information about tonsillitis in children. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your child's care.**

## What is tonsillitis and why does my child have it?

Tonsillitis is an inflammation of the tonsils. It is a common childhood illness but teenagers and adults can get it too. It is most commonly caused by a viral infection. Sometimes tonsillitis can also be caused by a bacterial infection.

The infection may spread by close physical contact with other people or by droplets in the air, caused by sneezing or coughing.

As with coughs, colds, flu and other similar infections, there is a chance that you can pass on the virus or bacteria that has caused tonsillitis.

## What are the signs and symptoms of tonsillitis?

Symptoms	Signs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A sore throat is the most common of all tonsillitis symptoms</li> <li>• Pain on swallowing</li> <li>• Pain may be referred to the ears</li> <li>• Small children may complain of abdominal pain</li> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• Cough</li> <li>• Changes in the voice</li> <li>• High temperature (fever)</li> <li>• Feeling sick</li> <li>• Feeling tired</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The tonsils may swell and become red.</li> <li>• Pus may appear as white spots on the tonsils.</li> <li>• Swollen painful glands in your child's neck. This feels like lumps on the side of the neck</li> <li>• Bad breath</li> </ul>

Symptoms typically get worse over two to three days and then gradually go, usually within a week.

## Are there any tests needed to confirm the diagnosis of tonsillitis?

No tests are usually needed to confirm the diagnosis of tonsillitis. The diagnosis of tonsillitis is a clinical one made by your doctor.

## How to treat tonsillitis yourself?

Tonsillitis usually has to run its course.

To help ease the symptoms:

- Make sure your child rests and gets plenty of sleep.
- Encourage your child to drink plenty of cool drinks to soothe the throat.
- A diet of soft foods may help if your child is having difficulty swallowing.
- Give your child paracetamol or ibuprofen. This will help improve the symptoms of pain and fever.
- A throat spray called 'diflam' can help ease the pain in the throat and help children to swallow fluids.

## Antibiotic treatment

### If you have not been given a prescription of antibiotics:

- Viral tonsillitis does not respond to antibiotic treatment.
- Antibiotics make little difference to how long symptoms last.
- Withholding antibiotics is unlikely to lead to complications.

### If you have been given a prescription of antibiotics:

- A small number of children will require antibiotics to treat their symptoms
- When antibiotics are given it is because the doctor or practitioner suspects a bacterial infection.
- It is important that you complete the full course of antibiotics. This is usually for seven days.

### If you have been given a delayed prescription of antibiotics

- Sometimes the doctor or practitioner will feel that antibiotics are currently not needed, but may be needed in the next 24-48 hours.
- You should collect the prescription of antibiotics if:
  - Symptoms become worse or
  - Symptoms do not respond to simple treatments
- If you are concerned about your child's symptoms you should arrange for your child to be reviewed by your GP

## Complications with tonsillitis

- Complications with tonsillitis are very rare.
- Sometimes you can get a pocket filled with pus (abscess) between your tonsils and the wall of your throat. This is called a quinsy.
- The following symptoms may suggest your child is not responding to treatment or has developed a complication:
  - A severe sore throat that quickly gets worse
  - Swelling inside the mouth and throat
  - Difficulty speaking
  - Difficulty swallowing
  - Difficulty breathing
  - Difficulty opening the mouth.

**If your child develops any of these symptoms take them to their GP or go to A&E.**

## When can my child return to school?

Children may return to school after the fever has resolved and they are no longer feeling unwell.

## Useful sources of information

You can find out more from the following weblink:

NHS Choices: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/tonsillitis/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

## Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns please contact the emergency department on 020 8725 2666

**For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.stgeorges.nhs.uk](http://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk)**

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## Additional services

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

**Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** [pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

### NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health. **Web:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

## NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones. **Tel:** 111

## AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website ([www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



**Reference:** AAE\_TIC\_01 **Published:** October 2021 **Review date:** October 2023