

# IDRS Infectious Disease Reporting System

Disease Reporting 24 Hours a Day

Columbus Public Health and Franklin County Public Health

## RHEUMATIC FEVER

Rheumatic fever is a disease that may develop after an infection with Streptococcus bacteria (such as strep throat or scarlet fever). The disease can affect the heart, joints, skin, and brain. Rheumatic fever is not common in the United States, and usually occurs in isolated outbreaks.

### Symptoms

Symptoms usually occur 1-5 symptom-free weeks after the strep infection and may include:

- Abdominal pain, vomiting, fever
- Heart problems, including symptoms like shortness of breath and chest pain
- Joint pain (mainly in the knees, elbows, ankles, and wrists) and swelling, redness or warmth
- Nosebleeds, skin bumps or rash
- Emotional instability, muscle weakness and jerking movements

### Transmission

- Rheumatic fever comes from an abnormal reaction in the body after having a strep infection. It is not contagious, although strep infections are. Sometimes, people with rheumatic fever could still have a strep infection. If so, they should isolate themselves for the first 24 hours of antibiotics.
- People get strep infections through close contact with an infected individual or carrier via the respiratory route. Strep infections include strep throat or scarlet fever.
- Very few individuals (1%-3%) who become infected with strep will develop rheumatic fever. There may be genetic factors that make some people more likely to get rheumatic fever.

### Treatment

- Because this disease has different forms, no one test can firmly diagnose it. Your health care provider will check heart rhythm, skin, and joints, along with blood tests for antibodies to strep and signs of inflammation.
- If you are diagnosed with acute rheumatic fever you will be treated with antibiotics. Anti-inflammatory medications such as aspirin or corticosteroids can also be used.
- Rheumatic fever may come back with another strep infection. You may have to take low doses of antibiotics over the long term to prevent strep throat from returning, especially during the first 3 -5 years after the first episode of the disease.
- Complications may include heart damage and irregular heartbeat and neurological problems.

### Prevention

- If you have strep throat or scarlet fever, get quick treatment and take the ENTIRE course of antibiotic prescribed.
- Prevent strep infections by avoiding close contact with persons who have strep throat or scarlet fever, and washing hands thoroughly and often to prevent infection.

All information is general in nature and is not intended to be used as a substitute for appropriate professional advice.



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