

UPDATE: Possible Increases in Group A Streptococcal Infections

DATE:	2/16/2023
TO:	Health Alert Network
FROM:	Debra L. Bogen, MD, FAAP, Acting Secretary of Health
SUBJECT:	UPDATE: Possible Increases in Group A Streptococcal Infections
DISTRIBUTION:	Statewide
LOCATION:	n/a
STREET ADDRESS:	n/a
COUNTY:	n/a
MUNICIPALITY:	n/a
ZIP CODE:	n/a

This transmission is a “Health Update,” and provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

HOSPITALS: PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, PEDIATRIC, NURSING AND LABORATORY STAFF IN YOUR HOSPITAL; **EMS COUNCILS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; **FQHCs:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; **LOCAL HEALTH JURISDICTIONS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE AS APPROPRIATE; **PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:** PLEASE DISTRIBUTE TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP; **LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES:** PLEASE SHARE WITH ALL MEDICAL, INFECTION CONTROL, AND NURSING STAFF IN YOUR FACILITY

Summary

- This guidance has been updated based on currently available information about pediatric invasive group A streptococcal infections nationally. **This HAN replaces PA-HAN-679**
- Based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC’s) preliminary 2022 data, the suspected increase in invasive group A streptococcal (iGAS) infections in children is a return to levels similar to those seen in pre-pandemic years.
- Laboratories are no longer being asked to store new iGAS isolates from children (<18 years of age) unless specifically requested by the Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH) or your local health department.
- DOH recommends holding previously stored iGAS isolates for 3 months.
- It is important for providers to continue to recognize group A streptococcal (GAS) infections early, especially among patients at high risk for severe illness.
- Report cases of iGAS to DOH through Pennsylvania’s electronic disease surveillance system, PA-NEDSS.
- Notify DOH at 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258) or your local health department as soon as possible about potential increases or clusters of iGAS infections.

BACKGROUND

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been looking into a possible increase in invasive group A streptococcal (iGAS) infections among children in the United States ([Possible Increase in Invasive Group A Strep Infections, 2022 - 2023](#)). In response to this

investigation, DOH requested laboratories to temporarily store iGAS isolates obtained from children (<18 years of age).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States had very low numbers of iGAS infections in children. This was likely due to the steps many people took during the pandemic to prevent the spread of respiratory diseases (e.g., school and workplace closures, masking, physical distancing). **Based on preliminary 2022 data, iGAS infections in children have returned to levels similar to those seen in pre-pandemic years.** The data also indicates that iGAS infection levels in children increased earlier in the season (September through November) than in a typical year (December through April) but occurred over a similar time period as increases in respiratory viruses (e.g., respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), influenza, and non-invasive group A streptococcal infections including strep throat).

At this time, Pennsylvania's 2022 iGAS numbers are still in the process of being finalized.

Thank you to laboratories and providers for your cooperation and diligent work to provide iGAS case information and storage of isolates.

UPDATED GUIDANCE FOR LABORATORIES

Laboratories are no longer being asked to store new iGAS isolates from children (<18 years of age) unless specifically requested by DOH or your local health department.

DOH recommends holding previously stored iGAS isolates for 3 months in the event the situation changes in the upcoming months.

UPDATED GUIDANCE FOR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

Healthcare providers should continue to encourage parents to make sure their children are up to date with influenza and varicella vaccines, as these infections can increase risk for getting an iGAS infection.

Recognizing group A streptococcal infections (GAS) early can prevent further GAS transmission and disease among individuals at high risk for severe outcomes.

REPORTING

As a result of its high morbidity and mortality, iGAS is reportable in Pennsylvania by laboratories and healthcare providers. Laboratories and healthcare providers are required to report cases of iGAS to DOH through Pennsylvania's electronic disease surveillance system, PA-NEDSS. Additionally, notify DOH at 1-877-PA-HEALTH (1-877-724-3258) or your local health department as soon as possible about potential outbreaks or clusters of iGAS infections.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

DOH:

- [Invasive Group A Streptococcus \(iGAS\) Toolkit](#)
- [Pharyngitis Fact Sheet Updated](#)
- [Invasive Group A Strep Fact Sheet](#)

CDC: [Group A Streptococcal \(GAS\) Disease](#)

CDC Alert: [Possible Increase in Invasive Group A Strep Infections, 2022 - 2023](#)

Categories of Health Alert messages:

Health Alert: conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

Health Advisory: provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

Health Update: provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

This information is current as of February 16, 2023, but may be modified in the future.