

What is rheumatic fever?

The Northern Advocate · 16 Sep 2022

Rheumatic fever starts with a sore throat, which is known as strep throat. It is a contagious infection caused by a bacteria called Streptococcus.

If strep throat lingers and is not treated with antibiotics it can cause rheumatic fever in children and young people.

Rheumatic fever is an autoimmune disease that attacks healthy parts of the body as well as strep throat germs.

The heart, joints (elbows and knees), brain and skin become inflamed and swollen. The inflammation from even one rheumatic fever attack can develop into rheumatic heart disease.

Symptoms of strep throat can include a painful or scratchy throat, especially when you swallow, redness at the back of the mouth, fever, bad breath, swollen neck glands and swollen tonsils covered in white stuff.

Every time your child has a sore throat, get them checked by a health professional. Children, Māori and Pasifika, and people in poorer or crowded living conditions are at risk.

Strep throat is usually treated with oral antibiotics for 10 days or a oneoff penicillin injection which clears the infection and prevents rheumatic fever.

When a patient is diagnosed with rheumatic fever for the first time they are usually admitted to hospital.

To prevent further outbreaks, patients will receive regular antibiotic injections for at least 10 years.