Appropriate testing for children with pharyngitis

Pharyngitis is the only condition among upper respiratory infections whose diagnosis can be validated through lab results. A strep test (rapid assay or throat culture) should be performed as an indicator for appropriate antibiotic use among all respiratory tract infections.\(^2\)

**Measure**

Patients 2–18 years of age who were diagnosed with pharyngitis, tonsillitis, or streptococcal sore throats who were dispensed antibiotics and received group A streptococcus (strep) tests during office or emergency room visits\(^3\)

**Exclusions**

Encounters with more than one diagnosis

Children with a history of antibiotic prescription within 30 days of encounter

**Patient medical record should include**

A group A streptococcus test three days before or three days after the prescription for children 2–18 years of age, who had an outpatient visit or emergency department encounter with a diagnosis of pharyngitis when an antibiotic was dispensed

**Tips for provider and/or staff when talking to the patient**

- If a patient tests negative for pharyngitis but insists on an antibiotic, refer to the illness as a sore throat due to a cold; patients tend to associate the label with a less-frequent need for antibiotics.
- Educate patients on the difference between bacterial and viral infections (this is a key point in the success of this measure).
- Document the performance of a rapid strep test or the patient’s, parent’s, or caregiver’s refusal of testing in medical records.
- Discuss with patients ways to treat symptoms:
  - Get extra rest.
  - Drink plenty of fluids.
  - Use over-the-counter medications.
  - Use a cool-mist vaporizer and nasal spray for congestion.
  - Eat ice chips or use throat spray or lozenges for sore throats.
- Let patients and their parents or caregivers know they can prevent infection by:
  - Washing hands frequently
  - Keeping an infected person’s eating utensils and drinking glasses separate from those of other family members
  - Thoroughly washing an infected toddler’s toys in hot water with disinfectant soap
  - Keeping a child diagnosed with pharyngitis out of school or daycare until he or she has taken antibiotics for at least 24 hours and until symptoms improve

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\(^1\) HEDIS is a registered trademark of the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA).


\(^3\) Peter Bach et al. HEDIS 2014 Technical Specifications for Health Plans (National Committee for Quality Assurance 2013), 100–103