



## iGAS factsheet: Invasive group A streptococcal infection (iGAS) – information for people who inject drugs

### Group A streptococcus (GAS)

Group A streptococcus is a type of bacteria often found in the throat and on the skin.

### How GAS is spread

It can survive in throats and on hands for long enough to be easily spread between people through sneezing, kissing, skin contact and sharing injecting equipment.

People may carry it in the throat or on the skin and have no symptoms of illness.

### Kinds of illnesses are caused by GAS

Most GAS infections are quite mild illnesses such as ‘strep throat’, or a skin infection such as impetigo. More rarely, these bacteria can cause other severe and even life-threatening diseases.

### Invasive group A streptococcal disease

Sometimes life-threatening GAS disease can happen when the bacteria get into parts of the body where bacteria are not usually found, such as the blood, muscle or the lungs. These infections are called invasive group A streptococcal disease.

### Why invasive group A streptococcal disease happens

Invasive GAS infections happen when the bacteria get past the defences of the person who is infected. This may happen when a person has sores or other breaks in the skin (such as a sore at an injection site) that mean bacteria can get into the tissue, or when the person is less able to fight off the infection because of chronic illness or an illness that affects the immune system.

Invasive GAS can be caused by sharing equipment associated with drug use, such as needles, syringes, spoons, filters and pipes. Frequent injecting and poor injecting technique will increase the risk of infection.

### What you need to be aware of

You need to be aware of the early signs and symptoms of invasive disease which include:

- high fever
- severe muscle aches
- localised muscle tenderness

- increasing pain, swelling and redness at site of wound
- unexplained diarrhoea or vomiting

#### What you should do if you develop any of these symptoms

If you develop any of these symptoms contact your GP or seek medical advice immediately. If anyone you know develops these symptoms, they should also contact their GP or seek medical advice immediately.

#### How to reduce your risk of infection

Contact local drug services for support and advice [add details].

Consider swallowing (bombing) or smoking instead of snorting and injecting.

If you are planning to inject:

- wash your hands thoroughly before injecting
- clean the injection site before injecting, with either an alcohol wipe or with soap and water
- always use new injecting equipment for every injection
- filter substances prior to injecting
- if injecting stimulants do not use citric acid or vitamin C, as these increase the damage caused to tissue at the injection site
- inject into a vein – injecting into muscle or skin causes more damage and increases the risk of infection
- after injecting, use something clean to stem the bleeding, such as gauze, and apply a plaster if possible

If you wish to stop your drug use, support is available on the [Frank](#) website.