



The National Programme for the Prevention and Control of Rheumatic Heart Disease

A sore throat can break your heart

Treating sore throat

The good news is that Rheumatic Fever can be prevented by treating sore throat with a cheap very effective antibiotic known as Penicillin. Your doctor or nurse should treat all children with sore throat with penicillin. It is important to remember rheumatic fever



does not spread between children (it is not contagious) although the streptococcus infection can do this.

Rheumatic Fever

Rheumatic Fever is an illness which affects children 5 to 15 years but it can also happen in young adults. It starts with a sore throat, caused by a germ known as Streptococcus. This causes a red, sore throat and sometimes tonsillitis. If not treated with antibiotics, this infection can go on to cause Rheumatic Fever where a few weeks later the child can get;

- ▶ fever
- ▶ sore or swollen ankles, knees or elbows (called arthritis)



- ▶ a skin rash
- ▶ jerky uncontrolled movements of the arms or legs (called chorea)
- ▶ fast breathing

These symptoms are temporary unless the heart valves have been damaged. If the heart valves are damaged during the episode of Rheumatic Fever then this may be permanent and this is then called Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD).



Rheumatic Heart Disease (“RHD”)



Heart valves make sure blood pumped through the heart and the body travels in one direction only. When the valves are damaged blood will leak backwards causing the heart to have to work harder. This will cause tiredness and difficulty breathing. It is important to get help from the Health Extension Worker in your district or from your doctor. Your child may need to stay in hospital for a week or more to have blood tests and heart scans and to get bed rest.

Some children will need open heart surgery to repair or replace the damaged heart valves.

Most children will go home and will have penicillin injections into their buttock every 4 weeks. The penicillin is given to prevent or stop them getting another attack of rheumatic fever which would seriously damage the heart. With good care and prevention using penicillin, most children who have rheumatic heart disease will lead normal healthy lives. Children who have RHD need extra antibiotics when they visit the dentist so that they do not get another very serious infection of the heart called infective endocarditis.

General health tips for you and your child



Eat a healthy balanced diet rich in protein and low in carbohydrates



Avoid tobacco smoking and other substance abuse



Prevent and avoid being overweight



Take special care of teeth



Take regular exercise



Wash hands after toilet and before touching food

Living with RHD



Always inform every doctor if you or your child has RHD

- ▶ Older sexually active women with RHD need special counselling on contraception
- ▶ Penicillin must continue through pregnancy and you should have a “delivery plan” for your baby
- ▶ You or your child may eventually need surgery for the heart valves
- ▶ Visit your RHD clinic every 6 months if necessary or at least once a year



RHD HELPLINE

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