

# Attention: NT GPs, Nurses and Health Practitioners

## THINK Acute Rheumatic Fever - ARF

ARF is caused by **Strep A (Streptococcus pyogenes) infection** of the throat and skin.  
ARF can lead to **rheumatic heart disease (RHD), disability, open heart surgery and death.**  
**Recurrent ARF increases the risk** of such complications.  
**ARF and RHD are prevalent in children and young adults** in the Northern Territory.



### At high risk:

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children** and young adults  
**Māori** and other **Pacific Islanders**  
**Migrants and refugees** from low- or middle-income country

Skin and throat infections in children at high risk **SHOULD BE TREATED WITH PENICILLIN** (or co-trimoxazole an alternative for skin sores) - see [CARPA guidelines](#) and [NT HealthPathways](#).

### The management of pharyngitis and skin sores is different in the Northern Territory.

The clinical decision rules to differentiate between viral and bacterial pharyngitis do not apply in communities with very high rates of Strep A infection.

Many cases of ARF are initially missed, since **early symptoms can be subtle**. ARF may present as one or more of:

- **Fever**
- **Joint pain**
- **Limping**
- **Involuntary twitching movements (chorea)**
- **Heart murmur**

### If these symptoms are present, do the following:

- Electrocardiogram (ECG)
- Bloods (FBC/FBE, ESR, CRP, ASOT, antiDNase B)
- Blood cultures if febrile
- Throat/skin sore swab (before giving antibiotics) & culture for Strep A
- Give benzathine penicillin G (BPG) injection (if not available commence oral antibiotics).
- Contact Paediatrician or Physician at relevant hospital to expedite admission for further evaluation to determine the diagnosis, commence treatment, echocardiography, education about ARF and RHD, and follow up.
- Notify to the NT ARF/RHD register.

**All suspected or confirmed cases of ARF need to be admitted to hospital for echocardiography and assessment of evolving symptoms.**



iOS



Android



Download the free Guidelines app with ARF Diagnosis Calculator

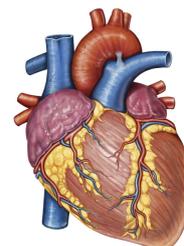
### REPORT ALL SUSPECTED AND CONFIRMED ARF TO THE NT RHD PROGRAM

Email [RHDDarwin.THS@nt.gov.au](mailto:RHDDarwin.THS@nt.gov.au)

Phone (08) 8922 8454

Email [RHDAliceSprings.THS@nt.gov.au](mailto:RHDAliceSprings.THS@nt.gov.au)

Phone (08) 8951 6909



### References:

[2020 Australian guideline for prevention, diagnosis and management of acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease \(3rd edition\)](#)  
[NT HealthPathways](#)  
[eTG complete](#)  
[CARPA Standard Treatment Manual 8th edition](#)

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