

6 December 2022

## **Letter to parents via primary schools, childcare and nursery settings regarding scarlet fever/ Group A streptococcal infection**

Dear Parent / Guardian,

There has been a rise in the number of cases of scarlet fever being reported nationally this year. Scarlet fever is caused by the bacteria Group A streptococcus (GAS). Lots of us carry it in our throats and on our skin and it doesn't always result in illness. However, GAS does cause a number of infections, some mild and some more serious. Scarlet fever is usually a mild illness however it should be treated with antibiotics to minimise the risk of complications and reduce the spread to others.

### **What are the symptoms of scarlet fever?**

The symptoms include a sore throat, headache, fever, nausea and vomiting. This is followed by a fine red rash which typically first appears on the chest and stomach, rapidly spreading to other parts of the body. On more darkly-pigmented skin, the scarlet rash may be harder to spot, but it will still feel like 'sandpaper'. The face can be flushed red but pale around the mouth.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/scarlet-fever/>

### **Complications**

If your child has an underlying health condition which affects their immune system, you should contact your GP or hospital doctor to discuss whether any additional measures are needed.

Children who have had **chickenpox** or **influenza ('flu')** recently are more likely to develop a more serious infection during an outbreak of scarlet fever and so parents should remain vigilant for symptoms such as a persistent high fever, cellulitis (skin infection) and arthritis (joint pain and swelling). If you are concerned for any reason please seek medical assistance immediately.

The symptoms of scarlet fever are similar and could also be caused by other illnesses circulating this year, such as respiratory viruses, flu or COVID-19, but if you are concerned about your child, seek advice from your GP or contact NHS 111.

### **Scarlet fever: symptoms, diagnosis and treatment - GOV.UK**

The most serious infections linked to GAS come from invasive group A strep, known as **iGAS**.

### **What is invasive Group A Streptococcal (iGAS) disease?**

Although rare, invasive Group A Streptococcus disease may occur when bacteria get into parts of the body where bacteria are not usually found. This type of infection is called invasive Group A Streptococcal disease and can be very serious and even life-threatening.

### **What are the symptoms of invasive Group A Streptococcal disease?**

The most important thing to be aware of are the early signs and symptoms of invasive Group A Streptococcal disease. These are:

- High Fever
- Severe muscle aches
- Localised muscle tenderness
- Redness at the site of a wound

## **What should I do if my child becomes unwell?**

If you think you, or your child, have scarlet fever:

- see your GP or contact NHS 111 as soon as possible
- make sure that you/your child takes the full course of any antibiotics prescribed by the doctor
- stay at home, away from nursery, school or work for at least 24 hours after starting the antibiotic treatment, to avoid spreading the infection

<https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2022/12/05/group-a-strep-what-you-need-to-know/>

## **What else can I do to prevent my child from becoming unwell?**

Good hand and respiratory hygiene are important for stopping the spread of many bugs. By teaching your child how to wash their hands properly with soap and warm water for 20 seconds, using a tissue to catch coughs and sneezes, and keeping away from others when feeling unwell, they will be able to reduce the risk of picking up, or spreading, infections.

Yours sincerely,

Iona Lidington  
Director of Public Health