

Scarlet fever / Group A Streptococcus briefing for schools, parents and carers

National data is showing that scarlet fever cases continue to remain higher than we would typically see at this time of year.

Scarlet fever is caused by bacteria called group A streptococci. It is usually a mild illness but is highly infectious. In very rare occasions, the bacteria can get into the bloodstream and cause an illness called invasive Group A Strep (iGAS).

Currently, there is no evidence that a new strain is circulating. The increase is most likely related to high amounts of circulating bacteria and social mixing.

Be extra vigilant of the signs and symptoms of scarlet fever which include sore throat, headache and fever, along with a fine, pinkish or red body rash with a sandpapery feel. On darker skin, the rash can be more difficult to detect visually but will have a sandpapery feel.

Contact NHS 111 or your GP if you suspect your child has scarlet fever, because early treatment of scarlet fever with antibiotics is important to reduce the risk of complications such as pneumonia or a bloodstream infection. If your child has scarlet fever, keep them at home until at least 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment to avoid spreading the infection to others.

There is no vaccine against group A strep, the main preventive measures are good hand and respiratory hygiene. By teaching your child how to wash their hands properly with soap 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.

As a parent, if you feel that your child seems seriously unwell, you should trust your own judgement. Contact NHS 111 if or your GP if:

- your child is getting worse
- your child is feeding or eating much less than normal
- your child has had a dry nappy for 12 hours or more or shows other [signs of dehydration](#)
- your baby is under 3 months and has a temperature of 38C, or is older than 3 months and has a temperature of 39C or higher
- your baby feels hotter than usual when you touch their back or chest, or feels sweaty
- your child is very tired or irritable

Call 999 or go to A&E if:

- your child is having difficulty breathing – you may notice grunting noises or their tummy sucking under their ribs
- there are pauses when your child breathes
- your child's skin, [tongue or lips are blue](#)
- your child is floppy and will not wake up or stay awake

Please follow the five steps in [this blog](#) to best protect your under 5s this winter.

Please see [here](#) for the most up-to-date national scarlet fever guidance.