Scarlet Fever and Strep A Information for Pupils, Parents and Staff

December 2022

Strep A (Group A streptococcus) is a common bacteria. Lots of us carry it in our throats and on our skin and it doesn’t always result in illness. However, Strep A can cause a number of infections, some mild and some more serious. Scarlet fever is caused by strep A and in rare cases, strep A can also cause a more serious illness called invasive group A strep infection.

Scarlet fever is usually a mild illness, though it typically needs to be treated with a course of antibiotics to minimise the risk of complications and reduce the spread to others. Scarlet fever, is highly contagious and is spread by close contact with someone carrying the bacteria. It takes around 2 to 5 days to develop symptoms after exposure to these bacteria. Scarlet fever usually clears up after a week, but it is advisable to visit your GP to get a full diagnosis and proper treatment.

Check for Scarlet Fever

The first signs of scarlet fever often include a sore throat, headache, fever, swollen neck glands (a large lump on the side of your neck), nausea and vomiting.

A rash appears 12 to 48 hours later. It looks like small, raised bumps and starts on the chest and tummy, then spreads. The rash makes your skin feel rough, like sandpaper. Typically, it first appears on the chest and stomach, rapidly spreading to other parts of the body. On more darkly-pigmented skin, the rash may be harder to spot, although the ‘sandpaper’ feel should be present.

Further symptoms include:

* fever over 38.3º C (101º F) or higher is common
* white coating on the tongue which peels a few days later, leaving the tongue looking red and swollen (known as ‘strawberry tongue’)
* swollen glands in the neck
* feeling tired and unwell
* flushed red face, but pale around the mouth. The flushed face may appear more ‘sunburnt’ on darker skin
* peeling skin on the fingertips, toes and groin area, as the rash fades

**Contact NHS 111 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](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nhs.uk%2Fconditions%2Fdehydration%2F&data=05%7C01%7CAnthony.White%40ukhsa.gov.uk%7C1f9a593c6c4f43e05e8408dad4598d6f%7Cee4e14994a354b2ead475f3cf9de8666%7C0%7C0%7C638055778334425225%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=2OWlyoGv45fgNhOsGYv0HPTJ61Baix3vg7NG16fyEvA%3D&reserved=0)
* 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](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nhs.uk%2Fconditions%2Fblue-skin-or-lips-cyanosis%2F&data=05%7C01%7CAnthony.White%40ukhsa.gov.uk%7C1f9a593c6c4f43e05e8408dad4598d6f%7Cee4e14994a354b2ead475f3cf9de8666%7C0%7C0%7C638055778334425225%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=sKef600WPZSZjEFdrOrVWU1PEKhPwcxR7Oz0ddcwPRE%3D&reserved=0)
* your child is floppy and will not wake up or stay awake

Managing the illness

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 or your child take(s) the full course of any antibiotics prescribed. Although you or your child will feel better soon after starting the course of antibiotics, you must complete the course to ensure that you do not carry the bacteria in your throat after you have recovered
* make sure you and members of your household frequently wash their hands with warm water and soap (for at least 20 seconds), particularly after using the toilet, after using a tissue to catch a cough or sneeze, and before eating.
* stay at home, away from nursery, school or work for at least 24 hours after starting the antibiotic treatment, to avoid spreading the infection
* You should not share eating utensils, clothes, bedding and towels with an infected person. All contaminated tissues or handkerchiefs should be washed, or disposed of immediately.

Useful links and guidance

Group A Strep - What you need to know (UKHSA): [Group A Strep - What you need to know - UK Health Security Agency (blog.gov.uk)](https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2022/12/05/group-a-strep-what-you-need-to-know/)

Update on scarlet fever and invasive Group A strep: UKHSA update on scarlet fever and invasive Group A strep - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

NHS, Scarlet Fever: [Scarlet fever - NHS (www.nhs.uk)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/scarlet-fever/)

Should I keep my child off school checklist: [Shoud I keep my child off school checklist poster (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fassets.publishing.service.gov.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fuploads%2Fsystem%2Fuploads%2Fattachment_data%2Ffile%2F1070910%2FUKHSA-should-I-keep-my_child_off_school_guidance-A3-poster.pdf&data=05%7C01%7CRob.Miller%40stockton.gov.uk%7C22f87a4ac28f452a546d08dad6cf9b8d%7Cc947251d81c44c9b995df3d3b7a048c7%7C0%7C0%7C638058484395216652%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=a%2FoSEz2tkscT8seDONWQ2gHFA7PXfiQfjXBfPCKcpYA%3D&reserved=0)