



7 December 2022



Dear Headteacher, nursery manager, early years setting

Re: Increase in scarlet fever

We are writing to inform you of a recent national increase in notifications of scarlet fever to the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), above seasonal expected levels.

We would like to take this opportunity to remind you of the signs, symptoms and the actions to be taken if you become aware of cases or an outbreak at your school or nursery.

Signs and symptoms of scarlet fever

Scarlet fever is a common childhood infection caused by *Streptococcus pyogenes*, or group A Streptococcus (GAS). It is not usually serious, but should be treated with antibiotics to reduce the risk of complications (such as pneumonia) and spread to others. The early symptoms of scarlet fever include sore throat, headache, fever, nausea and vomiting. After 12 to 48 hours, the characteristic red, pinhead rash develops, typically first appearing on the chest and stomach, then rapidly spreading to other parts of the body, and giving the skin a sandpaper-like texture. The scarlet rash may be harder to spot on darker skin, although the 'sandpaper' feel should be present. Patients typically have flushed cheeks and be pale around the mouth. This may be accompanied by a bright red 'strawberry' tongue.

Invasive Group A Strep (iGAS)

The same bacteria which cause scarlet fever can also cause a range of other types of infection such as skin infections (impetigo) and sore throat. In very rare cases, the bacteria can get into the bloodstream and cause an illness called invasive Group A strep (iGAS). Whilst still uncommon, there has been an increase in iGAS cases this

year, particularly in children under 10 years old. It is very rare for children with scarlet fever to develop iGAS infection. Parents are advised to trust their judgement when their child is unwell; if their child seriously deteriorates, they should speak to their GP or call 111 for advice.

Infection control advice

In schools and nurseries, infections can be spread through direct physical contact between children (and staff) and through shared contact with surfaces such as table tops, taps, toys and handles. During periods of high incidence of scarlet fever there may also be an increase in outbreaks in schools, nurseries and other childcare settings. As per national '[Health protection in children and young people settings, including education](#)' guidance, children and adults with suspected scarlet fever should be **excluded** from nursery / school / work for **24 hours** after the commencement of appropriate antibiotic treatment. Good hygiene practice such as hand washing, regular cleaning of classrooms and equipment and good ventilation are the most important steps in preventing and controlling spread of infection.

Outbreak of Scarlet Fever

An outbreak of scarlet fever is two or more scarlet fever cases attending the same school / nursery or other childcare setting notified within 10 days of each other.

Please see the guidance [Management of scarlet fever outbreaks in schools \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) if you suspect there is an outbreak.

You should contact your HPT on NWLHPT.Oncall@ukhsa.gov.uk for advice, if:

1. You have one or more cases of chickenpox or flu in the class that has scarlet fever at the same time. This is because infection with scarlet fever and either chickenpox or flu at the same time can result in more serious illness.
2. You are experiencing an outbreak of scarlet fever in a setting / class that provides care or education to children who are clinically vulnerable.
3. The outbreak continues for over 2 weeks, despite taking steps to control it.
4. Any child or staff member is admitted to hospital with any Group A Strep (GAS) infection (or there is a death).
5. Any issues that are making it difficult to manage the outbreak.

If you could include the information above in emails if possible.

Our contact details: NWLHPT.OnCall@ukhsa.gov.uk (and phone 020 3326 1658)
If you have any concerns about managing outbreaks in your setting, please contact your local Health Protection Team for advice.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Yimmy Chow
Consultant in Health Protection
and Head of NWL HPT, UKHSA

Dr Nicola Lang
Director of Public Health
LB Hammersmith and Fulham

Resources

[NHS – Scarlet Fever](#)

[Scarlet fever: symptoms, diagnosis and treatment](#)

[Management of scarlet fever outbreaks in schools \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

[Health protection in education and childcare settings](#)

[Hand hygiene resources for schools](#)