



**To - Headteachers of primary schools
Managers of early years settings
School public health nursing teams**

14th Nov 2022

Dear Colleagues,

Re: Elevated Levels of scarlet fever

We are writing to inform you that we continue to see elevated levels of scarlet fever cases particularly in young children.

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). 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 pallor around the mouth. This may be accompanied by a 'strawberry tongue'. As the child improves peeling of the skin can occur.
- [Scarlet Fever Factsheet: includes some useful information and images.](#)

Outbreaks

- During periods of high levels of scarlet fever there may also be an increase in outbreaks in schools, nurseries and other childcare settings
- Children who have recently had/have influenza or chickenpox are more at risk of developing serious GAS infection during an outbreak of scarlet fever and so the school and parents should remain vigilant for symptoms such as a persistent high fever, cellulitis (skin infection) and arthritis (joint redness, pain or swelling).
- Schools, nurseries and other childcare settings have on rare occasions been the focus for clusters of invasive GAS disease, especially when there are both outbreaks of chickenpox and influenza at the same time as GAS infections.

Recommended actions if you suspect an outbreak at your school or nursery:

- Contact your Health Protection Team for advice * Your Health Protection Team will assist you with a risk assessment and provide you with a letter and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) to cascade to staff and parents if appropriate.

Although scarlet fever is usually a mild illness, patients can develop complications. If you become aware of cases who require hospitalisation and/or are reported to have complications, please contact your local Health Protection Team for advice.

Infection control advice

- It remains important that scarlet fever cases are treated promptly with antibiotics to limit further spread, and reduce risk of potential complications in cases
- As per national Guidance on Infection Control in Schools and other Child Care Settings (linked below), children and adults with suspected scarlet fever should be clinically assessed by a GP and if scarlet fever is suspected they should be excluded from nursery / school / work for 24 hours after the commencement of appropriate antibiotic treatment.
- In schools and nurseries, it is recognised that infections can be spread through direct physical contact between children and staff and through shared contact with surfaces such as tabletops, taps, toys and handles.
- Maintaining an ongoing emphasis on regular environmental cleaning, hand and respiratory hygiene, and ensuring staff and children who are unwell stay away from the setting, remain the most important steps and will help reduce transmission of most infections within your setting.
- Encouraging the staff and pupils to receive influenza vaccinations in line with national schedule, especially where they are known to be in risk groups.
- Encourage all pupils to be up to date with all recommend national childhood immunisations

Further advice and guidance can be found online here:

- [Health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities](#) includes updated advice on managing COVID-19 and other common childhood infections
- [5 ways to protect your under 5s this winter](#) - useful Blog you may wish to share with parents
- [Home \(e-bug.eu\)](#) is a health education programme which support infection prevention and control efforts
- [The complete routine immunisation schedule from February 2022](#)

Yours faithfully

Dr Anita Bell

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***How to contact your local health protection team (HPT)**

Enter your postcode to get support and contact details for your local HPT here:

<https://www.gov.uk/health-protection-team>