

Scarlet Fever and invasive Group A Strep

Group A streptococcus (GAS), also referred to as Strep A is a common bacterium. Lots of us carry it in our throats and on our skin and it does not always result in illness. However, GAS does cause a number of infections, some mild and some more serious.

Milder infections caused by GAS include scarlet fever, impetigo, cellulitis and pharyngitis. These can be easily treated with antibiotics.

The most serious infections linked to GAS come from invasive group A strep, known as iGAS. These infections are caused by the bacteria getting into parts of the body where it is not normally found, such as the lungs or bloodstream. In rare cases an iGAS infection can be fatal.

Whilst iGAS infections are still uncommon, there has been an increase in cases this year, particularly in children under 10 and sadly, a small number of deaths. We would like to remind parents/carers of symptoms to look out for, and what to do should their children become unwell.

Action for parents/carers

Group A Strep commonly lives on our skin so good hand hygiene can prevent its spread to others. If there is infection, it is usually a mild illness that can be easily treated with antibiotics.

But in rare circumstances, this group of bacteria can get into the bloodstream and cause serious illness – called invasive Group A strep. This is still uncommon. However, it is important that parents and carers are on the lookout for symptoms and see a doctor as quickly as possible so that their child can be treated, and we can stop the infection becoming serious.

Parents/carers are asked to inform schools/nurseries if their child has scarlet fever.

Symptoms

The first signs of scarlet fever can be flu-like symptoms, including a high temperature, a sore throat and swollen neck glands (a large lump on the side of your neck).

A rash can appear 12 to 48 hours later. It looks like small, raised bumps and starts on the chest and tummy, then spreads. On darker skin, the rash can be more difficult to detect visually. On all skin types it will have a sandpapery feel.



Contact NHS 111 or your GP if you suspect your child has scarlet fever. Early treatment with antibiotics is important to reduce any risk of complications.

If your child has scarlet fever, keep them at home for at least 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment to avoid spreading the infection to others. Please also inform your school or nursery.

If you think your child is getting worse

The symptoms of invasive Group A Strep (iGAS) are: high fever, severe muscle aches, localised muscle pain, unexplained diarrhoea or vomiting. Make sure you talk to a health professional (NHS 111 or your GP) if your child is showing signs of deteriorating after a bout of scarlet fever, a sore throat, or a respiratory infection.

As a parent, if you feel that your child seems seriously unwell, you should trust your own judgement and seek NHS advice.

Further information

For further information on scarlet fever and invasive Group A strep, please visit:

- [Group A Strep - What you need to know - UK Health Security Agency \(blog.gov.uk\)](#)
- [NHS guidance on group A streptococcal infections](#)