

## **December 2022**

### **Scarlet Fever and Group Strep A Infections**

UKHSA (UK Health Security Agency) is reporting an increased number of cases of Group A streptococcus (Strep A) compared to normal at this time of year. There is no evidence that a new strain is circulating and the increase is most likely related to high amounts of circulating bacteria and social mixing.

#### **What are scarlet fever and Strep A?**

Scarlet fever is caused by bacteria called Group A streptococci (Strep A). The bacteria usually cause a mild infection that can be easily treated with antibiotics.

In very rare occasions, the bacteria can get into the bloodstream and cause an illness called invasive Group A strep (iGAS).

#### **What are the symptoms of Strep A/scarlet fever?**

Strep A infections can cause a range of symptoms that parents should be aware of, including:

- Sore throat
- Headache
- Fever
- 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

If a child becomes unwell with these symptoms, please advise parents to contact their GP practice or contact NHS 111 (which operates a 24/7 service) to seek advice.

If a child has scarlet fever, advise they stay at home until at least 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment to avoid spreading the infection to others.

Encourage parents to trust their own judgement and if their child seems seriously unwell call 999 or go to A&E if:

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

## **Managing confirmed cases**

Early years settings and schools will contact their health protection team if there is an outbreak of 2 or more scarlet fever cases within 10 days of each other and the affected individuals have a link, such as being in the same class or year group.

If there are confirmed or suspected cases in an education or childcare setting, there is no reason for children to be kept at home if they are well.

## **How to help prevent Strep A?**

To prevent the spread of Strep A, UKHSA advises children, young people and staff to implement good [hand and respiratory hygiene](#) practices. For more information visit the UKHSA [website](#) or the [Education Hub](#).