

Dr Sandra Husbands  
Director of Public Health, City of London  
& London Borough of Hackney

7 December 2022

Dear parents and carers,

**Re: High levels of scarlet fever (caused by group A streptococcus)**

I am writing with regards to the recent national increase in cases of scarlet fever (which is caused by group A strep.), which are higher than what is expected at this time of year. I would like to take this opportunity to remind you of the signs and symptoms and the actions to be taken if you think your child might have scarlet fever.

Scarlet fever is caused by the common bacteria called group A streptococcus. It is not usually serious, but should be treated with antibiotics to reduce the risk of complications and spread to others. In very rare occasions, the bacteria can get into the bloodstream and cause a more serious illness called invasive group A strep (iGAS). 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. It is very rare for children with scarlet fever to develop iGAS infection.

Group A strep. is spread by close contact with an infected person and can be passed on through coughs and sneezes or from a wound. There is no vaccine against group A strep. The best way to prevent spread is good hand and respiratory hygiene. By teaching your child how to wash their hands properly with soap for 20 seconds, using a tissue to catch coughs and sneezes, and keeping away from others when feeling unwell, they will be able to reduce the risk of picking up, or spreading, infections.

**Look out for signs and symptoms in your child which include:**

- 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.
- Patients typically have flushed cheeks and be pale around the mouth. This may be accompanied by a bright red red 'strawberry' tongue.

Contact NHS 111 or your GP if you suspect your child has scarlet fever. Early treatment with antibiotics is important to reduce the risk of complications, such as pneumonia or a bloodstream infection.

If your child has scarlet fever, keep them at home until at least 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment to avoid spreading the infection to others.

**As a parent or carer, if you feel that your child seems seriously unwell, you should trust your own judgement.**

**Contact NHS 111 if 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
- 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
- your child is floppy and will not wake up or stay awake

### **Other ways to protect your child this winter**

The numbers of people with flu being admitted to hospital and intensive care are increasing. The highest rates of admission are among children under the age of 5. All children aged 2 or 3 years old, primary school children, children aged 2 to 17 with long-term health conditions and some secondary school children are eligible for a free, nasal spray vaccine. There is no injection required.

Children aged 2 or 3 and those with a long-term health condition can access their flu vaccine through their GP. Children that attend primary and secondary school will be able to access the vaccine through their school.

Vaccination is the best defence against severe illness. To protect your child, check their red book or contact your GP to make sure that your child is up to date with all of their vaccines.

Yours faithfully,



*Dr Sandra Husbands  
Director of Public Health, City of London & London Borough of Hackney*