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**Re: Higher than average number of infections caused by Group A Streptococcus and when to seek medical help, including for other types of coughs and colds this winter**

Dear Parent/Carer/Staff member,

The UK is currently experiencing a higher number of cases of infection caused by a bacterium called Group A Streptococcus when compared to previous years. These bacteria usually cause a mild infection including sore throats or a characteristic cluster of symptoms that begins with a sore throat, headache, and fever, followed by a pinkish or red, sandpaper-like rash on the chest and abdomen 12-48 hours later, that gives rise to the name of the infection as Scarlet Fever. The illness can affect children of all ages. **It is important that parents speak to their GP or NHS 111 if they think they have a child with Scarlet Fever so the infection can be quickly treated with antibiotics, and this will help prevent it from worsening.**

Children with suspected Scarlet Fever should not attend nursery or school for 24 hours after the commencement of appropriate antibiotic treatment when they will no longer be infectious to others. Spread of infection can also be prevented by good hand and respiratory hygiene (catching sneezes in disposable tissues, placing them in the bin, and washing hands), and by keeping away from others when feeling unwell.

In very rare circumstances, the bacteria can get into the bloodstream and cause a more serious illness called invasive Group A strep (iGAS). Where a child has recently had **chickenpox** or **influenza (flu)** there is a higher risk of more serious illness from Group A Streptococcus and parents should remain vigilant for symptoms such as persistent high fever, skin infection, joint pain and swelling, or muscle pain and tenderness, and to seek medical assistance urgently if worried. Breaching the skin barrier provides a portal of entry for the organism and therefore all abrasions and wounds should be thoroughly cleaned and covered.

As we all know, there are also lots of viruses that cause sore throats, coughs and colds at this time of year. These should resolve without medical intervention. However, children can on occasion develop a bacterial infection on top of a virus and that can make them more unwell. As a parent or carer trust your instincts if your child seems seriously unwell.

Contact NHS 111 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 38°C, or is older than 3 months and has a temperature of 39°C or higher
- your baby feels hotter than usual when you touch their back or chest, or feels sweaty



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- your child is very tired or irritable

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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

Further information about Scarlet Fever can be found in the fact sheet from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) which is attached to this letter, as well as on the [NHS Healthier Together website](#) which also provides helpful information about other childhood infections including when to seek further medical help.

Many children are also eligible for a free seasonal influenza vaccine. For further information about eligibility and where you can get vaccinated, please go to [Child flu vaccine - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

Please do all you can to keep yourselves and your families well this winter.



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## Fact sheet for schools and parents about Group A Streptococcus (GAS)/Scarlet Fever.

### What is Group A Streptococcus?

Group A Streptococcus or *Streptococcus pyogenes* is a bacterium that can be found in the throat and on the skin. People may carry it and have no symptoms of illness or may develop infection.

### How is it spread?

Group A Streptococcus survives in throats and on skin for long enough to allow easy spread between people through sneezing and skin contact. People who are currently carrying the bacteria in the throat or on the skin may have symptoms of illness or they may have no symptoms and feel fine. In both cases, these bacteria can be passed on to others.

### What kinds of illnesses are caused by Group A Streptococcus?

Most Group A Streptococcus illnesses are relatively mild, with symptoms including a sore throat ("strep throat"), scarlet fever or a skin infection such as impetigo. However, on rare occasions, these bacteria can cause other severe and sometimes life-threatening diseases.

Although scarlet fever is usually a mild illness, it should be treated with antibiotics to minimise the risk of complications and reduce the spread to others.

The **symptoms** of scarlet fever include a sore throat, headache, fever, nausea and vomiting. This is followed by a fine red rash which typically first appears on the chest and stomach, rapidly spreading to other parts of the body. On more darkly-pigmented skin, the scarlet rash may be harder to spot, but it will still feel like 'sandpaper'. The face can be flushed red but pale around the mouth.

Children who have had **chickenpox** or **influenza ('flu')** recently are more likely to develop more serious infection during an outbreak of scarlet fever and so parents should remain vigilant for symptoms such as a persistent high fever, cellulitis (skin infection) and arthritis (joint pain and swelling). If you are concerned for any reason please seek medical assistance immediately.

### What is invasive Group A Streptococcal (iGAS) disease?

Although rare, invasive Group A Streptococcus disease may occur when bacteria get into parts of the body where bacteria are not usually found. These infections are called invasive Group A Streptococcal disease and can be very serious and even life-threatening.

## **What are the symptoms of invasive Group A Streptococcal disease?**

The most important thing to be aware of are the early signs and symptoms of invasive Group A Streptococcal disease. These are:

- High Fever
- Severe muscle aches
- Localised muscle tenderness
- Redness at the site of a wound

## **What should I do if my child becomes unwell?**

If your child becomes unwell contact your GP practice. Alternatively, you can call NHS111 and you should also call NHS111 if your surgery is closed.

## **If my child is unwell, should they stay off school?**

If your child becomes unwell with these symptoms you should contact your GP practice or call NHS111 (which operates a 24/7 service) to seek advice. If your child is unwell they should stay off school until they are better.

## **What else can I do to prevent my child from becoming unwell?**

Because Group A Streptococcal disease is spread through coughing, sneezing and skin contact, it's important to have good hand hygiene and catch coughs and sneezes in tissues and throw these away. If you are unwell, stay at home and seek medical advice. This will all help limit the spread of other infections, which are common this time of year.