



Strep A infections: what you need to know

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has warned parents and carers to be alert after an increase in Strep A infections across the country. But what exactly are Strep A infections and what are the warning signs?

What is Strep A?

Strep A is a bacteria that is sometimes found in the throat or on the skin that can cause a range of illnesses, including strep throat and impetigo. Strep A can also cause scarlet fever, as well as a much rarer illness called invasive Group A Strep (iGAS).

What is scarlet fever?

Scarlet fever is a contagious infection

that mostly affects young children. It is usually mild and can be treated with antibiotics but spreads very easily.

The symptoms of scarlet fever are a sore throat, headache and high temperature along with a fine body rash with a sandpaper-like feel. The rash normally starts on the chest and tummy and then spreads. It will normally look pink or red on pale skin but may be harder to see on darker skin, though you will still be able to feel it.

Another symptom is a white coating on the tongue which peels, leaving the tongue red, swollen and covered in little bumps ('strawberry tongue').

What should I do if I suspect my child has scarlet fever?

If you think your child may have scarlet fever, you should contact NHS 111 or your GP so that they can start a course of antibiotics as soon as possible. This is important because early treatment of scarlet fever with antibiotics reduces the risk of complications such as pneumonia or a bloodstream infection.

If your child is confirmed as having scarlet fever, you should keep them at home until at least 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment to avoid spreading the infection to others.

What is invasive Group A Strep?

Invasive Group A Strep or iGAS is a very rare illness caused by Strep A bacteria getting into the bloodstream. While this illness is still very uncommon, there has been an increase in cases this year compared to the pre-pandemic period. UKHSA advises parents and carers to talk to a health professional if their child is showing signs of deteriorating after a bout of scarlet fever, a sore throat, or a

respiratory infection.

You should 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 three months and has a temperature of 38°C, or is older than three 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
- your child is very tired or irritable

You should 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 on scarlet fever is available on the [NHS website](#).

More information on strep A infections, including both scarlet fever and iGas, is available on the [UKHSA website](#).