



## UK Health Security Agency North West

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To: Educational settings in the NW

02 November 2023

Dear all,

Following on from the last update shared on 29 March 2023, we are writing to update you on the current NW arrangements for the management of scarlet fever.

Now that national and regional case numbers are more in keeping with expected seasonal averages, we are returning to business-as-usual arrangements. As per current national UKHSA guidance, **please could you notify all suspected scarlet fever outbreaks<sup>1</sup> in your settings to your local UKHSA Health Protection Team** (please see relevant contact details as above). Please note this request does not apply to single scarlet fever cases.

The UKHSA Health Protection Team will undertake a risk assessment and offer public health advice. For uncomplicated scarlet fever outbreaks this advice will include the following:

### Actions to take for all scarlet fever outbreaks

- In nurseries and schools, it is recognised that infections can be spread through direct physical contact between children and staff and through shared contact with surfaces such as tabletops, taps, toys, electronic devices and handles. Maintaining an ongoing emphasis on **environmental cleaning, hand washing, respiratory hygiene, and ensuring staff and children who are unwell remaining away from the setting**, will help reduce transmission of most infections within your setting. **These measures, alongside improved ventilation where possible, are particularly important when respiratory viruses are also circulating.** Ensure any cuts or scrapes are thoroughly cleaned and covered with waterproof dressings to help prevent invasive infection.
- Children and adults with scarlet fever should **not attend** nursery / school / work until **24 hours** after starting appropriate antibiotic treatment for scarlet fever.
- Whilst scarlet fever is circulating it is especially important that any children and adults with chickenpox do stay off nursery or school until all their blisters have dried over, which is at least 5 days after they first appeared.
- Share 'warn and inform' information with parents in the affected class or group. A template letter for use will be provided by UKHSA.

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<sup>1</sup> An 'outbreak' is defined as 2 or more cases attending the same class or group in the same nursery, school or childcare setting within 10 days of each other.

**Complicated scarlet fever outbreaks** may require additional actions based on the individual risk assessment undertaken. Schools and nurseries should also contact their UKHSA Health Protection Team in any of the following situations:

- You have one or more cases of chickenpox or flu in a class that has a scarlet fever outbreak<sup>2</sup> at the same time. This is because infection with scarlet fever and either chickenpox or flu at the same time can result in more serious illness.
- You are experiencing an outbreak of scarlet fever in a setting or class that provides care or education to children who are clinically vulnerable.
- A scarlet fever outbreak continues for over 3 weeks, despite taking steps to control it.
- Any child or staff member is hospitalised or has died with group A Strep (GAS) infection

### **Signs and symptoms of scarlet fever**

Scarlet fever is a common childhood infection caused by *Streptococcus pyogenes*, or group A streptococcus (GAS). The early symptoms of scarlet fever include sore throat, headache, fever, nausea and vomiting. After 12 to 48 hours the characteristic red, pinhead rash develops, typically first appearing on the chest and stomach, then rapidly spreading to other parts of the body, and giving the skin a sandpaper-like texture. On white skin the rash looks pink or red. On brown and black skin it might be harder to see a change in colour, but you can still feel the sandpaper-like texture of the rash and see the raised bumps. Patients typically have flushed cheeks and pallor around the mouth. This may be accompanied by a 'strawberry tongue'. As the child improves peeling of the skin can occur.

### **Further guidance**

More information about scarlet fever can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scarlet-fever-symptoms-diagnosis-treatment>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/scarlet-fever/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scarlet-fever-managing-outbreaks-in-schools-and-nurseries>

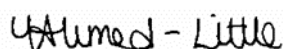
Guidance on exclusion for a range of infectious diseases can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities>

Specific guidance for under 5s over winter can be found at:

<https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2022/10/25/5-ways-to-protect-your-under-5s-this-winter/>

Yours sincerely



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<sup>2</sup> An 'outbreak' is defined as 2 or more cases attending the same class or group in the same nursery, school or childcare setting within 10 days of each other.