



One minute guide to...

Scarlet Fever for Education Settings

What is it?

Scarlet fever is usually a mild illness caused by bacteria that occurs most often in the winter and spring, however it is highly contagious and is spread by close contact with someone carrying the bacteria. It takes around 2 to 5 days to develop symptoms after exposure to these bacteria.

Symptoms 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.

Actions to take if you have cases in your setting:

- Send children home if they are unwell. Ensure children and staff who are unwell remain away from the setting for any advised period of time. Here is a useful summary of when a child should stay at home: [Is my child too ill for school? - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/scarlet-fever/).
- Advise parents and carers to seek advice from their GP if they think their child may have scarlet fever.
- Children can return to your setting 24 hours after commencing appropriate antibiotic treatment.
- If no antibiotics have been administered the person will be infectious for 2 to 3 weeks and so it is recommended that the individual stays away from school or nursery for 3 weeks.

To reduce transmission:

- Ensure surfaces are cleaned regularly, especially high touch areas.
- Encourage children and staff to wash their hands regularly.
- Promote good respiratory hygiene (using tissues for coughs, sneezes, and runny noses). Place used tissues in the bin.
- Ensure any cuts or scrapes are thoroughly cleaned and covered with waterproof dressings to help prevent invasive infection.
- Improve ventilation if any indoor spaces are hot and stuffy, or your carbon dioxide monitor is showing high readings.

Further Action to take:

- Whilst scarlet fever is circulating it is especially important that any children and adults with chickenpox stay off school or their early years setting until all their blisters have dried over, which is at least 5 days after they first appeared.
- Whilst scarlet fever is circulating it is important children and adults with symptoms of flu should stay off nursery or school until they no longer have symptoms.
- No specific actions required by the setting for other Group A Strep infections such as sore throats (and many sore throats are caused by viruses) or Impetigo. However, if anyone is prescribed antibiotics for a sore throat, they should stay away from your setting for at least 24 hours after starting antibiotic treatment. Anyone with Impetigo should also stay away from your setting until all lesions (sores or blisters) are crusted over or until 48 hours after commencing antibiotic treatment.



Further action to take (continued):

• Invasive Group A Streptococcus (iGAS)

In very rare cases, GAS bacteria can get into the bloodstream and cause an illness called invasive Group A Strep (iGAS). Whilst still uncommon, there has been an increase in iGAS cases this year, particularly in children under 10 years old. It is very rare for children with scarlet fever to develop iGAS infection. However, it is important that parents and carers understand the signs and symptoms of invasive disease and seek medical attention promptly. This is why we ask education settings to send out advice letters to parents and guardians when there is an outbreak of Scarlet Fever in the setting.

Who to inform?

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 (phone:0344 2250562 opt 2 or email: cl.hpt@ukhsa.gov.uk)** 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 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

If you have two or more cases of scarlet fever and do not meet any of the criteria above, you can still contact the UKHSA helpline which will signpost you to national guidance, advice and will assess the need for their 'warn and inform' information for parents in the affected class or group. A template letter will be provided by UKHSA.

What is an outbreak of Scarlet Fever?

An outbreak of Scarlet Fever is defined as two or more cases in a class or specific close mixing group that occurs within a 10-day period. There are no actions required for a single case of Scarlet Fever. If an outbreak in a defined class or group is continuing beyond 2 weeks, please review your infection control measures. **Single cases in different classes or groups do not constitute an outbreak.**

Further Information:

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

National guidance:

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

<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/>
- E-bug information for hand hygiene: [Home \(e-bug.eu\)](https://www.e-bug.eu/)