

Scarlet Fever

Patient Information Leaflet

What is Scarlet Fever?

Scarlet Fever is one of the illnesses caused by bacteria known as Group A Streptococci. Another name for Scarlet Fever is Scarletina. Streptococci are often carried in the throat and on the skin therefore the most common illnesses are sore throats and impetigo (a skin infection).

What are the symptoms?

The time between being in contact with the bacteria and symptoms starting (the incubation period) is between 2 and 5 days.

The symptoms include: -

- Sore throat
- Fever
- Deep red skin rash. This usually appears on the neck and chest during the first 24 hours then spreads to the rest of the body. The rash lasts about 2 to 5 days. After it has gone, often the skin on the tips of the fingers and toes begins to peel.
- Flushed face with a pale area around the mouth
- Initially the tongue will have a white coating that peels off by day 5 to leave the 'strawberry' tongue (the tongue is red and looks like a strawberry)

The symptoms may go away quickly after starting antibiotic treatment.

How does it spread?

It is thought that about 1 in 5 people carry the bacteria in their throats without becoming ill.

The bacteria can be spread

- By contact with the mouth or nose fluids from a person who is carrying the bacteria during sneezing, coughing or kissing.
- Possibly by touching your mouth, nose or eyes after touching something that is contaminated with fluids from the nose or mouth of an infected person e.g. tissues

During winter months, more people are coughing and sneezing and so we see this illness more in the winter. Outbreaks are more likely in group settings such as nurseries, schools, colleges, etc.

What precautions must I take?

Since so many people carry the bacteria in their throats, it is impossible to completely prevent Scarlet Fever however it is possible to reduce the risk by the following:

- If you or someone close to you has Scarlet Fever you should be very careful with hand hygiene, thoroughly washing hands using a liquid soap. Each member of the family should have their own towel.
- Wash hands carefully after coughing or handling objects soiled with fluids from the infected person's mouth or nose e.g. used tissues.
- Dispose of tissues directly into the bin after use.
- As always keeping the home as clean as possible will reduce the risk of infection spreading

Will treatment be necessary?

Many people feel very concerned when they are told they or their children have Scarlet Fever, but ,usually it is very easy to treat with antibiotics. It is important that you complete the course of antibiotics as instructed on the bottle or packet.

If untreated, this illness can continue for about 3 weeks.

You should stay away from work, or keep infected children away from nurseries, playgroups, schools, etc. until 24 hours after the start of the course of antibiotics and until the person is clinically recovered.

If you have any further questions about this leaflet please contact NHS Lothian Health Protection team for advice on 0300 790 6264.