

Dear colleagues,

## **Re: Scarlet fever and invasive Strep A disease**

Following recent confirmation of some deaths caused by invasive group A Streptococcus (iGAS) infection in children, we are writing to update you on the current situation regarding scarlet fever and other GAS infections and provide some advice on potentially severe cases.

Notifications of scarlet fever to UKHSA have been above the levels expected for this time of the year. So far this season there have also been 6 recorded deaths within 7 days of an invasive GAS diagnosis in children under 10 in England. This rare and severe disease usually follows from scarlet fever cases. There is no evidence that a new strain is circulating. The increase is most likely related to high amounts of circulating bacteria and social mixing.

See below some guidance to support conversations with staff and parents and at early if you suspect of a severe case or outbreak at your school or nursery.

### **Scarlet fever**

Scarlet fever is a common childhood infection, usually mild but highly infectious. It is caused by a bacteria called group A streptococcus (GAS) which also causes sore throat and impetigo. The early symptoms of scarlet fever include sore throat, headache, fever, nausea and vomiting, followed by a fine, pinkish or red body rash with a sandpapery feel. The rash may be harder to spot on darker skin, but the sandpapery feel will usually be present. Other common symptoms are flushed cheeks, pallor around the mouth and a 'strawberry-like' tongue.

**Parents should contact NHS 111 or their GP if they suspect a child has scarlet fever, because early treatment of scarlet fever with antibiotics reduces the risk of complications such as pneumonia or a bloodstream infection.** Children with scarlet fever should stay at home until at least 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment to avoid spreading the infection to others. They can return to school/nursery after 24h of antibiotic use if they do not have a fever anymore.

### **Invasive group A Strep infection**

In very rare occasions, the bacteria can get into the bloodstream and cause an illness called invasive Group A strep (iGAS). The initial signs of iGAS are the same of other severe infectious diseases. As a parent or teacher, if you feel that a child seems seriously unwell, you should trust your own judgement. Here is some general advice for parents:

#### **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 child is very tired or irritable

**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

**Infection prevention and control**

During periods of high incidence of scarlet fever there may also be an increase in outbreaks in schools, nurseries and other childcare settings. Good hand and respiratory hygiene (washing hands for 20 seconds, using a tissue to catch coughs and sneezes) remain the most important steps in preventing and controlling spread of infection. No routine contact tracing or further isolation are usually required.

If you suspect of an outbreak or have any other concerns, please contact the regional Health Protection Team for advice on 0113 386 0300. If you have any other queries, you can also get in touch with the Council's health protection team via email [HPTBradford@bradford.gov.uk](mailto:HPTBradford@bradford.gov.uk).

For additional information on scarlet fever symptoms and treatment see this:

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

For information on outbreak management see:

- [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/771139/Guidelines\\_for\\_the\\_public\\_health\\_management\\_of\\_scarlet\\_fever\\_outbreaks\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/771139/Guidelines_for_the_public_health_management_of_scarlet_fever_outbreaks_.pdf)

And here is the latest UKHSA press release on group A strep infection, from 2 December 2022:

- [UKHSA update on scarlet fever and invasive Group A strep - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ukhsa-update-on-scarlet-fever-and-invasive-group-a-strep)

Kind regards,

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