



**Public Health Department**

All schools in Kent

County Hall  
Sessions House  
Maidstone  
ME14 1XQ

Email:  
anjan.ghosh@kent.gov.uk

6 December 2022

Dear Headteachers

As you are aware sadly a small number of children have died of invasive Group A Streptococcus (iGAS) recently. I am writing to you in my role as Director of Public Health at Kent County Council to provide some background information to help you manage the raised level of concern and anxiety among parents of children in your school.

Group A streptococci is a type of bacterium that can cause scarlet fever and although this is rare – it can get into the bloodstream and cause an illness called invasive Group A strep (iGAS). This can cause other respiratory and skin infections too such as strep throat and impetigo. Scarlet fever itself is usually a mild illness, but it is highly infectious. Further information on Scarlet fever from the NHS is available here <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/scarlet-fever>

***If a child has scarlet fever, they need to be kept at home until at least 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment to avoid spreading the infection to others.***

Please use the online NHS symptom checker to advise parents about the symptoms of scarlet fever.

Whilst still uncommon there has been an increase in Invasive Group A strep cases this year, particularly in children under 10 years old. So far there have been several recorded deaths within 7 days of an iGAS diagnosis in children under 10-years-old in England. During the last high season for Group A Strep infection (2017 to 2018) there were 4 deaths in children under 10 in the equivalent period. Sadly, the number of deaths is rising.

There are also reports of an increase in lower respiratory tract Group A strep infections in children over the past few weeks, which have caused severe illness. Currently, 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. Additionally, there are lots of viruses circulating that cause sore throats, colds, and coughs, most of which should resolve without medical intervention. However, children can occasionally develop a bacterial infection on top of a virus which can make them more unwell.

The UK Health Security agency which provides advice to health professionals around infectious diseases issued the following advice to parents:

“As a parent, if you feel that your child seems seriously unwell, you should trust your own judgement. 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 baby feels hotter than usual when you touch their back or chest, or feels sweaty
- 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”

### **So, what should you tell parents?**

The most important advice is to talk to a health professional if their child is showing signs of deterioration after a bout of scarlet fever, a sore throat, or a respiratory infection. Follow the NHS advice for getting the right support at the right time [www.kentandmedwayccg.nhs.uk/your-health/local-services](http://www.kentandmedwayccg.nhs.uk/your-health/local-services). In an emergency always call 999.

Good hand and respiratory hygiene can stop the spread of many bugs. Children should know how to wash their hands properly with soap for 20 seconds and should be encouraged to always use a tissue to catch coughs and sneezes.

Children should also know to stay away from people who are obviously unwell with coughs and colds, because it reduces the risk of picking up or spreading infections.

Common respiratory bacteria and viruses circulate much more in the winter months. Being vigilant and seeking care at the right time will help health care professionals to manage the illness promptly.

We are working with all our partners across the health and care system to monitor the situations and further guidance and advice will be issued to professionals as the situation develops. The attached information from the UK Health Security Agency is also helpful.

I hope my letter provides you with the information you need to support and inform parents of children at your school. Please use the letter as you consider appropriate. I wish you, your staff, pupils, and their families a safe and healthy Christmas.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Anjan Ghosh', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Dr Anjan Ghosh**  
Director of Public Health  
Public Health