

Public Health

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Dear Parent/Guardian,

Across the country and in Greater Manchester we have seen a recent increase in the number of cases of scarlet fever. Scarlet fever is a highly contagious bacterial infection commonly seen in young children.

The bacteria that causes it is called group A streptococcus (group A strep or GAS) and it is a common bacteria. Lots of us carry it in our throats and on our skin and it doesn't always result in illness.

However, GAS does cause a number of infections, including scarlet fever, impetigo and strep throat. Group A strep is spread by aerosol - coughing, sneezing, singing and talking - as well as coming into direct contact with an infected person or things they may have touched.

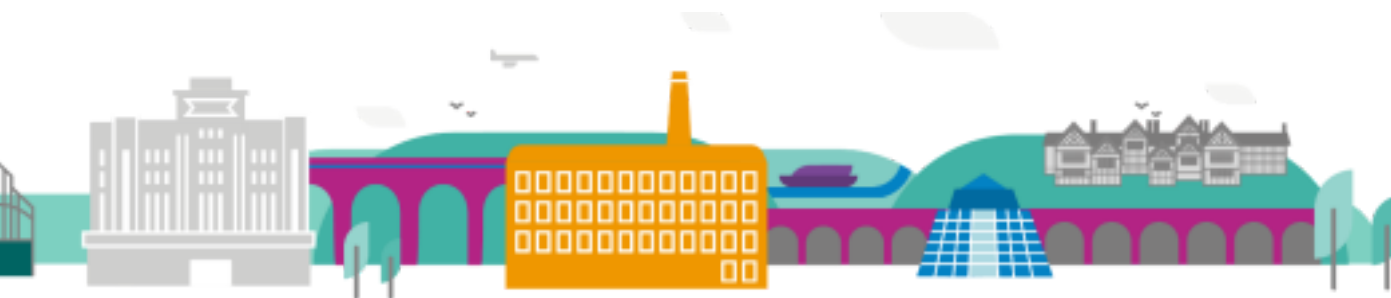
There are lots of viruses that cause sore throats, colds and coughs circulating. These should get better without medical treatment. However, sometimes children can develop a bacterial infection on top of a virus and that can make them more unwell.

We are seeing a higher number of cases of scarlet fever / GAS infections this year than we usually would. The infections are usually mild and easily treated with antibiotics.

Very rarely, the bacteria can get into the bloodstream or lungs and cause serious illness – called invasive Group A strep (iGAS). Whilst iGAS infections are still uncommon, there has been an increase in cases this year, particularly in children under 10.

Please be vigilant for these symptoms of scarlet fever in your child:

- The first signs of scarlet fever can be flu-like symptoms, including a high temperature, headache and a sore throat.
- A rash appears 12 to 48 hours later. On white skin it looks like small, red or pink raised bumps and starts on the chest and tummy, then spreads. The rash can be harder to see on darker skin but it will feel rough, like sandpaper.
- Sometimes a white coating also appears on the tongue. This peels, leaving the tongue red, swollen and covered in little bumps bright red tongue called a 'strawberry tongue'.
- Flushed cheeks and with a pale area around the mouth.



If you notice any of these symptoms, please keep your child at home and speak to your GP or call 111 to see if treatment is necessary. Please also let your child's school or nursery know. The vast majority of children will go on to make a full recovery and will return to school 24 hours after starting antibiotics.

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

There are some simple steps that we can all take to help reduce the onward transmission of any infectious disease:

- Frequent and effective handwashing - teach your child how to wash their hands properly for 20 seconds with soap and water and make sure all the family are washing their hands regularly.
- Good respiratory hygiene - catch coughs and sneezes in a tissue and put used tissues straight in the bin. Stay away from others when you are unwell.
- Maintain good ventilation - open windows or doors whenever possible, this helps to carry away the infectious droplets that may have been coughed, sneezed or breathed out. If it's cold outside, you can open windows for just a few minutes every hour.
- Making sure your child is fully vaccinated - whilst there is no vaccine against group A strep, vaccination is one of the most important things we can do to protect ourselves and our children against ill health.

Stay vigilant for symptoms, more information on childhood illness can be found on Health A to Z - NHS (www.nhs.uk).

Yours faithfully,



A handwritten signature in grey ink that reads "Jennifer Connolly".

Jennifer Connolly
Director of Public Health