

Directorate: Adults and Health

Team: Public Health

Dr Will Maimaris Director of Public Health

INFORMATION ON Group A Streptococcus (Strep), Scarlet Fever and Invasive Group A Strep (iGAS) for parents and carers

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to update you and provide further information about the increased notifications of scarlet fever and iGAS we are seeing across the UK (compared to the average for this time of year) and the actions you need to take.

Group A Strep

Group A Strep is a common bacteria which many of us carry in our throats and on our skin. It doesn't always result in illness. Group A Strep is spread by close contact with an infected person and can be passed on through coughs and sneezes or from a wound. Handwashing, using a tissue to catch coughs and sneezes and keeping away from others when feeling unwell are important actions for stopping the spread of many bacteria, including Group A Strep. Group A Strep can cause a number of infections, some mild and some more serious.

Scarlet Fever

Scarlet fever is an illness caused Group A strep. Scarlet fever is usually a mild illness, and treatable with antibiotics, but it is easily passed on from one person to another. These bacteria also cause other respiratory and skin infections such as Strep throat and impetigo.

Symptoms of scarlet fever include a sore throat, red and swollen tongue, headache, and fever, along with a fine, pink or red body rash with a sandpapery feel. On darker skin, the rash can be more difficult to see but will have a sandpapery feel. Photo examples of some of these symptoms are available by following the link to the NHS website at the bottom of this letter.

Contact NHS 111 or your GP if you suspect your child has scarlet fever, because early treatment with antibiotics is important to reduce the risk of complications, such as pneumonia or a bloodstream infection.

If your child has scarlet fever, keep them at home until at least 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment to avoid spreading the infection to others.

Invasive Group A Strep (iGAS)

In a small proportion of cases, Group A Strep bacteria can cause serious problems, and very rarely the bacteria can get into the bloodstream and cause an illness called invasive Group A Strep (iGAS). In rare cases, an iGAS infection can be fatal. Whilst iGAS is still uncommon, there has been an increase in iGAS cases this year, particularly in children under age 10, and sadly a small number of deaths.

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
- 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

You can find more information about scarlet fever at: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/scarlet-fever/>

You can find more information about iGAS at: <https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2022/12/05/group-a-strep-what-you-need-to-know/>

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Maimaris', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Will Maimaris
Director of Public Health