

Scarlet Fever

What is it?

- An illness caused by group A streptococcus bacteria that causes a scarlet coloured rash and is often associated with Strep Throat. Also called Scarletina.
- Anyone can get scarlet fever, but it usually affects those between 5 and 15 years of age.

How is it spread?

- Direct contact with an infected person or the large droplets that form when an infected person talks, coughs, or sneezes. If the droplets touch the mouth, nose, or eyes they can cause infection.
- Those who are sick with an upper respiratory tract infection are more likely to transmit the infection.
- May spread indirectly by sharing eating utensils, cups or touching other contaminated items and then touching your eyes, mouth or nose.
- Contact with sores from group A strep skin infections.

What are the symptoms?

- Usually begins with a very red, sore throat and fever. There may also be swollen neck glands, chills, body aches, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, headache and loss of appetite.
- One or two days later a fine red rash starts, that feels like sandpaper when touched. Bright red skin often appears on underarms, groin, and elbow creases as well as the neck, chest and inner surface of the thighs. The rash can also appear before illness or up to 1 week later. The rash will go white when touched.
- Cheeks may be flushed and the area around the mouth pale.
- May be a whitish coating on the tongue or back of throat and a strawberry tongue (red and bumpy).
- Rash generally fades in about 7 days.
- As the rash fades, the skin may peel at the finger tips, toes and groin areas. The peeling can last for several weeks.

When do symptoms start?

2-5 days after exposure to the bacteria.

How long is it contagious?

- Generally no longer contagious after 24 hours of treatment with antibiotics.

- If untreated, usually less contagious after 2 to 3 weeks but can be contagious for weeks or months.

How is it treated?

- See a health care provider for a rapid strep test to determine if illness is caused by a group A strep infection and if antibiotics are required.
- Continue to take all medication prescribed, even if signs of the illness have gone away.
- Even untreated, most people will fully recover. Some who are not treated may develop ear infections, sinusitis, tonsil abscesses, pneumonia, or infected lymph nodes. There are some serious heart and kidney complications that can also occur following a group A strep infection.

How is it prevented?

- Frequent and thorough hand washing especially:
 - ✓ after wiping nose
 - ✓ before eating or preparing food
 - ✓ if you have a sore throat
- Cover mouth when sneezing or coughing and teach small children the same.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as drinking cups, utensils, towels and linens with others.

Should I go to childcare, school or work?

Excluded from school or work for 24 hours after treatment with antibiotics is started and until person is able to participate in activities.

For further information, please contact the Communicable Disease Control Program staff at 705-474-1400 or 1-800-563-2808, ext 5229.

References:

American Academy of Pediatrics. (2017). Strep Throat (Streptococcal Pharyngitis) and Scarlet Fever. In: Aronson SS, & Shope TR, eds. *Managing infectious diseases in child care and schools: A quick reference guide*, 4th ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics, p. 159-160..

Group A Streptococcal Infections. (2015). In: Heymann DL, ed. *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*, 20th ed. Washington, DC: American Public Health Association. Alpha press; pp.581-589.

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