

To: Nurseries and Schools in the North West

6 December 2022

Dear Colleague,

Re: Update on scarlet fever and iGAS cases in the North West

Further to our communications in September 2022 regarding scarlet fever, we are writing with an update and advice on important actions you can take in your settings.

Regionally and nationally, we continue to see high rates of scarlet fever, higher than would be expected for this time of year. The same pattern continues to be seen with cases of invasive group A streptococcus (iGAS) increasing, particularly in children under 10 years. iGAS is a far less common infection caused by the same bacteria as scarlet fever but can lead to more serious illness.

There are actions nurseries and schools can take to help reduce spread of infection. Please note key infection control advice as outlined below. Signs and symptoms of scarlet fever are also included below as a reminder.

Signs and symptoms of scarlet fever

Scarlet fever is a common childhood infection caused by *Streptococcus pyogenes*, or group A streptococcus (GAS). The early symptoms of scarlet fever include sore throat, headache, fever, nausea and vomiting. After 12 to 48 hours the characteristic red, pinhead rash develops, typically first appearing on the chest and stomach, then rapidly spreading to other parts of the body, and giving the skin a sandpaper-like texture. The scarlet rash may be harder to spot on darker skin, although the 'sandpaper' feel should be present. Patients typically have flushed cheeks and pallor around the mouth. This may be accompanied by a 'strawberry tongue'. As the child improves peeling of the skin can occur.

Actions to take

• **Infection control advice**

In nurseries and schools it is recognised that infections can be spread through direct physical contact between children and staff and through shared contact with surfaces such as table tops, taps, toys and handles. Maintaining an ongoing emphasis on **environmental cleaning, hand washing, respiratory hygiene, and ensuring staff and children who are unwell remaining away from the setting**, will help reduce transmission of most infections within your setting. **These measures, alongside improved ventilation where possible, are particularly important at the moment as a number of respiratory viruses are also circulating.** Ensure any cuts or scrapes are thoroughly cleaned and covered with waterproof dressings to help prevent invasive infection. Please do continue to liaise with your Local Authority Health Protection Team for further advice and support on infection control.

- Children and adults with suspected scarlet fever should **not attend** nursery / school / work until **24 hours** after starting appropriate antibiotic treatment for scarlet fever.
- Whilst scarlet fever is circulating it is especially important that any children and adults with chickenpox do stay off nursery or school until all their blisters have dried over, which is at least 5 days after they first appeared.

- If you suspect an **outbreak of scarlet fever** at your nursery or school (i.e. two or more linked cases, for example in the same class or year group), **please complete the attached minimum dataset and email it your relevant health protection team** (email addresses are within the minimum dataset form) and the health protection team will contact you.
- In addition to the above please continue to liaise with your Local Authority Health Protection Team.
- If you have any cases of chickenpox or flu whilst scarlet fever is still present in the same class or year group, please notify your health protection team on **0344 225 0562**.

Further guidance

More information about scarlet fever can be found here:

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

Guidance on exclusion for a range of infectious diseases can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities>

Specific guidance for under 5s for this winter can be found at:

<https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2022/10/25/5-ways-to-protect-your-under-5s-this-winter/>

Yours sincerely,

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cc NW DPHs, UKHSA Consultants in Health Protection