Dear Headteacher,

**Re: Increase in scarlet fever**

We are writing to inform you of a recent national increase in notifications of scarlet fever to the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), above seasonal expected levels.

We would like to take this opportunity to remind you of the signs, symptoms and the actions to be taken if you become aware of cases or an outbreak at your school or nursery.

**Signs and symptoms of scarlet fever**

While case numbers are high, parents should be on the lookout for the symptoms of scarlet fever so that appropriate and timely treatment can be given.

[Scarlet fever](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nhs.uk%2Fconditions%2Fscarlet-fever%2F&data=05%7C01%7CLisa.Bullock%40ukhsa.gov.uk%7Cc6a1775049c44fa39d6008dadd11f88a%7Cee4e14994a354b2ead475f3cf9de8666%7C0%7C0%7C638065366488844405%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=a5sKYEPlbCLU1NY1MGIv2OrN%2FGlpetKMAR0hFVey7X4%3D&reserved=0) is usually a mild illness that clears up quickly after a course of antibiotics. It usually starts with a sore throat, headache, fever, nausea and vomiting, followed by a rash that feels like sandpaper to the touch.

The rash usually develops after 12 to 48 hours, typically on the chest and stomach first, then rapidly spreading to other parts of the body.

On white skin the rash looks pink or red. On brown and black skin it might be harder to see a change in colour, but you can still feel the sandpaper-like texture of the rash and see the raised bumps.

Patients typically have flushed cheeks and can be pale around the mouth. This may be accompanied by a bright red ‘strawberry’ tongue.

Despite the increase we are seeing in scarlet fever and other Group A Strep infections, the risk of the bacteria causing a more serious infection remains very low.

**Invasive Group A Strep (iGAS)**

The same bacteria which cause scarlet fever can also cause a range of other types of infection such as skin infections (impetigo) and sore throat. In very rare cases, the bacteria can get into the bloodstream and cause an illness called invasive Group A strep (iGAS). Whilst still uncommon, there has been an increase in iGAS cases this year, particularly in children under 10 years old. It is very rare for children with scarlet fever to develop iGAS infection. Parents are advised to trust their judgement when their child is unwell; if their child seriously deteriorates, they should call 999 or go to A&E.

## Infection control advice

In schools and nurseries, 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. During periods of high incidence of scarlet fever there may also be an increase in outbreaks in schools, nurseries and other childcare settings. During an outbreak cleaning of the environment, including toys and equipment, should as a minimum be carried out daily and a very thorough terminal clean should be undertaken when the outbreak is declared over. Touch points such as taps, toilet flush handles, and door handles, should be cleaned regularly throughout the day. You can find more information here [Preventing and controlling infections - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities/preventing-and-controlling-infections#cleaning). As per national ‘[Health protection in children and young people settings, including education](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities/managing-specific-infectious-diseases-a-to-z)’ guidance, children and adults with suspected scarlet fever should be **excluded** from nursery / school / work for **24 hours** after the commencement of appropriate antibiotic treatment. Good hygiene practice such as hand washing, regular cleaning of classrooms and equipment and good ventilation are the most important steps in preventing and controlling spread of infection.

**Outbreak of Scarlet Fever**

An outbreak of scarlet fever is two or more scarlet fever cases attending the same school / nursery or other childcare setting notified within 10 days of each other. Please see the guidance [Management of scarlet fever outbreaks in schools (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1110540/Guidelines_for_the_public_health_management_of_scarlet_fever_outbreaks.pdf) if you suspect there is an outbreak.

You should contact your HPT on [XXXXXXXXX] for advice, if:

1. You have two or more cases of chickenpox or flu in the class that has scarlet fever at the same time. This is because infection with scarlet fever and either chickenpox or flu at the same time can result in more serious illness.
2. You are experiencing an outbreak of scarlet fever in a setting / class that provides care or education to children who are clinically vulnerable.
3. The outbreak continues for over 2 weeks, despite taking steps to control it.
4. Any child or staff member is admitted to hospital with any Group A Strep (GAS) infection (or there is a death).
5. Any issues that are making it difficult to manage the outbreak.

If you have any concerns about managing outbreaks in your setting, please contact your local Health Protection Team for advice.

Yours sincerely,

[signature]

**Resources**

[NHS – Scarlet Fever](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/scarlet-fever/)

[Scarlet fever: symptoms, diagnosis and treatment](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scarlet-fever-symptoms-diagnosis-treatment)

[Management of scarlet fever outbreaks in schools (publishing.service.gov.uk)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1110540/Guidelines_for_the_public_health_management_of_scarlet_fever_outbreaks.pdf)

[Health protection in children and young people settings](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities/managing-specific-infectious-diseases-a-to-z), including education

[Hand hygiene resources for schools](http://www.e-bug.eu/)