

SCARLET FEVER

We have been advised of children at our nursery having scarlet fever

Scarlet fever is a contagious infection that mostly affects young children. It's easily treated with antibiotics.

Check if you have scarlet fever

The first signs of scarlet fever can be flu-like symptoms, including a high temperature of 38C or above and swollen neck glands (large lump on the side of your neck).

A rash appears a few days later.



A pink-red rash comes out, which feels like sandpaper and looks like sunburn. It starts on the chest and tummy



A white coating also appears on the tongue. This peels, leaving it red and swollen ("strawberry tongue")



The rash doesn't appear on the face, but the cheeks can be flushed

The symptoms are the same for children and adults, although scarlet fever is much rarer in adults.

See a GP if you or your child:

- has scarlet fever symptoms
- doesn't get better in a week (after seeing the GP), especially if your child has recently had chickenpox
- is ill again weeks after scarlet fever has cleared up – this can be a sign of a complication, such as pneumonia

Scarlet fever is very infectious. Check with the GP before you go in. They may suggest a phone consultation.

What happens at your appointment

GPs can often diagnose scarlet fever by looking at the tongue and rash. Sometimes they may:

- wipe a cotton bud around the back of the throat to test for bacteria
- arrange a blood test

Treating scarlet fever

Your GP will prescribe antibiotics. These don't cure scarlet fever, but they will help you get better quicker. They also reduce the risk of serious illnesses, such as pneumonia.

It's important to keep taking antibiotics until they're finished, even when you feel better.

Things you can do yourself

You can relieve symptoms of scarlet fever by:

- drinking cool fluids
- eating soft foods to ease a sore throat
- taking painkillers like paracetamol to bring down a temperature (don't give aspirin to children under 16)
- using calamine lotion or antihistamine tablets to stop itching

How long scarlet fever lasts

Scarlet fever lasts for around a week.

You're infectious from up to 7 days before the symptoms start and until:

- 24 hours after you take the first antibiotic tablet
- 2 weeks after symptoms start, if you don't take antibiotics

Is scarlet fever dangerous?

In the past, scarlet fever was a serious illness, but antibiotics mean it's now less common and easier to treat.

Cases of scarlet fever have increased in recent years. Public Health England records the [number of scarlet fever infections each year](#).

Complications are rare but can include:

- ear infection
- throat abscess
- pneumonia
- meningitis
- rheumatic fever

People with the skin condition [impetigo](#) are more likely to get complications.

Pregnancy advice

There's no evidence to suggest that getting scarlet fever during pregnancy will harm your baby. But it can make you feel unwell, so it's best to avoid close contact with anyone who has it.

Contact your GP if you do get symptoms.

The antibiotics used for scarlet fever are usually safe to take during pregnancy.

How to avoid spreading scarlet fever

Scarlet fever is very infectious and can easily spread to other people.

To reduce the risk of spreading scarlet fever:

Do

- wash hands often with soap and warm water
- use tissues to trap germs from coughs or sneezes
- bin used tissues as quickly as possible

Don't

- share cutlery, cups, towels, clothes, bedding or baths