

Public health briefing on Scarlet fever and invasive group A strep

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) has reported that scarlet fever cases are higher than we would typically see at this time of year. Scarlet fever is caused by bacteria called group A streptococci. These bacteria also cause other respiratory and skin infections such as strep throat and impetigo (a skin infection). In very rare occasions, the bacteria can get into the bloodstream and cause an illness called invasive Group A strep (iGAS). While still uncommon, there has been an increase in invasive Group A strep cases this year, particularly in children under 10. Sadly there have also been six (updated to nine) deaths involving iGAS recorded in children since September.

UKHSA is monitoring the situation very closely and they advise that the increase is most likely related to high amounts of circulating bacteria and social mixing. There are lots of viruses that cause sore throats, colds and coughs circulating as well. These should resolve without medical intervention. However, children can on occasion develop a bacterial infection on top of a virus and that can make them more unwell.

Advice for educational settings

What to do if you have a case of scarlet fever in your setting and when to contact UKHSA

Exclude the affected individual until 24 hours after commencing appropriate antibiotic treatment. If no antibiotics have been administered, the individual will be infectious for 2 to 3 weeks and should be excluded for this period.

- Advise the parent or carer to seek advice from their GP.
- Encourage children, young people and staff to implement good hand hygiene practices.
- Encourage staff, children and young people to implement good respiratory hygiene practices.

You should contact the UKHSA East of England Health Protection Team (Phone: 0300 303 8537 option 1, Email: EastofEnglandHPT@ukhsa.gov.uk) if there is an outbreak of 2 or more scarlet fever cases within 10 days of each other and the affected individuals have a link, such as being in the same class or year group.

Advice for parents and carers

Symptoms of scarlet fever and when to see a GP

Scarlet fever is a contagious bacterial infection that mostly affects young children. It is easily treated with antibiotics. The first signs of scarlet fever can be flu-like symptoms, including high temperature, a sore throat and swollen neck glands (a large lump on the side of your neck).

A rash appears 12 to 48 hours later. It looks like small, raised bumps and starts on the chest and tummy, then spreads. The rash makes your skin feel rough, like sandpaper. On white skin the rash looks pink or red. It may be harder to see on brown and black

skin, but you can still feel it. A white coating also appears on the tongue. This peels, leaving the tongue red, swollen and covered in little bumps (called “strawberry tongue”). The rash does not appear on the face, but the cheeks can look red. The redness may be harder to see on brown and black skin.

Contact a GP if your child:

- Has scarlet fever symptoms
- Does not get better in a week (after seeing a GP)
- Has scarlet fever and chickenpox at the same time
- Is ill again, weeks after scarlet fever got better – this can be a sign of a complication, such as rheumatic fever
- Is feeling unwell and has been in contact with someone who has scarlet fever

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

What to do if you feel your child seems seriously unwell

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 or shows other signs of dehydration
- 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

Good hand and respiratory hygiene are important for stopping the spread of many bugs. By teaching your child how to wash their hands properly with soap for 20 seconds, using a tissue to catch coughs and sneezes, and keeping away from others when feeling unwell, they will be able to reduce the risk of picking up or spreading infections

SAFETY ALERT: BABY SELF-FEEDING PILLOWS



An urgent safety alert has been issued today by the Office for Product Safety and Standards, for baby self-feeding pillows /prop feeders that present a risk of serious harm or death from choking or aspiration pneumonia. The public is urged to stop using them immediately and dispose of them safely.

Businesses selling these products must immediately remove them from the market as they cannot comply with the safety requirements under the General Product Safety Regulations 2005.

Baby self-feeding pillow products are designed to be attached to a bottle so that the baby may be positioned on its back to self-feed without the assistance of a caregiver holding the bottle and controlling the feed. This is inconsistent with [NHS guidance in relation to safe bottle feeding](#).

When used as intended, even whilst under the supervision of a caregiver, it could lead to immediate, serious harm or death from choking or aspiration pneumonia.

Consumers, local authority trading standards services and businesses are asked to take specific action to cease use or remove these products from the market as advised below.

Action

OPSS has identified that this category of products will always be dangerous due to their design and intended use and can never be made safe.

Consumers

- Consumers should immediately stop using these products and dispose of them safely.

Businesses

- Must immediately remove these products from the market as they cannot comply with the safety requirements under the General Product Safety Regulations, 2005.

- Must comply with their obligations under product safety law.

Local Authority Trading Standards and Northern Ireland Environmental Health

- Should identify and take appropriate action against businesses that sell baby self-feeding pillows as they do not comply with the safety requirements set down in the General Product Safety Regulations, 2005.

[Visit the Office for Product Safety and Standards web pages on GOV.UK](#) for further information and contact details.