SCARLET FEVER – advice for parents and carers

Scarlet fever, or ‘Strep A’, is caused by bacteria called group A streptococci (strep).

Scarlet fever is usually a mild illness, but it is highly infectious. Therefore, look out for symptoms in your child, which include a sore throat, headache, and fever, along with a fine, pinkish or red body rash with a sandpapery feel.

On darker skin, the rash can be more difficult to detect visually, but will have a sandpapery feel.

Contact NHS 111 or your GP practice if you suspect your child has scarlet fever, because early treatment of scarlet fever with antibiotics is important to reduce the risk of complications such as pneumonia.

If your child has scarlet fever, keep them at home until at least 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment to avoid spreading the infection to others.

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, and sadly a small number of deaths which are being investigated.

It is important to mention that there are lots of viruses that cause sore throats, colds and coughs this time of year. In most cases, these infections will be a mild illness and can be treated at home. These should resolve without medical intervention. If you do need advice, your community pharmacy is a great first port of call for minor health issues. However, children can on occasion develop a bacterial infection on top of a virus and that can make them more 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 practice 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 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.

**What you need to know – advice for parents and carers this winter**

This is the first winter without pandemic restrictions in two years, and you and your children may be more susceptible to the usual winter bugs and viruses this year.

Winter bugs and viruses are usually mild, but can sometimes become more serious, particularly in younger children or if an infection spreads to a vulnerable family member.

There are several common infections that your child might pick up over the winter period. In most cases, these infections will be a mild illness and can be treated at home. However, in some cases they might get worse and require medical help.

Some common infections include:

**Flu**

Flu can be an unpleasant illness in children causing a fever, stuffy nose, dry cough, sore throat, aching muscles and joints, and extreme tiredness. This can last several days or longer.

In most cases, flu will be a mild illness in children.

Some children can get a very high fever, sometimes without the usual flu symptoms, and may need to go to hospital for treatment. Serious complications of flu include a painful ear infection, acute bronchitis, and pneumonia. The best way for your child to avoid flu, to ensure your child is vaccinated against flu. Learn more about the flu symptoms to look out for and who to contact, as well as vaccination.

**Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV)**

RSV is a common winter virus which affects children under the age of two.

Most cases are not serious and cause mild coughs and colds.

It is also the most common cause of bronchiolitis infants. Bronchiolitis can make breathing harder and cause difficulty feeding.

RSV can be more severe in premature babies, babies under 2 months and infants with underlying health conditions that increase their risk of acute lower respiratory tract infection. Breathing in cigarette smoke also increases the risk of a child getting bronchiolitis, so it is important not to smoke around your child. Learn more about the bronchiolitis symptoms to look out for and who to contact if you have concerns.

**Scarlet Fever**

Scarlet fever is usually a mild illness, but it is highly infectious and levels are higher than normal this year. Therefore, look out for symptoms in your child, which include a sore throat,

headache, and fever, along with a characteristic fine, pinkish or red body rash with a sandpapery feel.

Contact your GP practice or NHS 111 if you suspect your child has scarlet fever, because early treatment of scarlet fever with antibiotics is important to reduce the risk of complications such as pneumonia.

If your child has Scarlet Fever, keep them at home until at least 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment to avoid spreading the infection to others.

Getting help and advice

As a parent, you may know if your child seems seriously unwell and should trust your own judgement.

You should contact your GP practice or call 111 if:

· your child has had a cold and 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 38C, or is older than 3 months and has a temperature of 39C 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

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, many bugs. An e-bug resources for Early Years can help you to explain to your child