

## COMMUNITY AND HOUSING DEPARTMENT

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Dear Parents and Carers,

### **Information on ways for your child to stay well this winter, including scarlet fever**

You may have seen recent national media headlines about scarlet fever particularly in young children– the number of recent cases that we have seen across the country is higher than what we have seen in previous years. Very sadly, a small number of children have died due to an infection called invasive Group A Strep (iGAS) which is linked to scarlet fever in the UK. This letter includes key information on scarlet fever and other ways for children to stay well this winter.

**Scarlet fever** (sometimes called scarlatina) is an infectious disease caused by a bacteria (Group A streptococcal bacteria).

**Signs and symptoms of scarlet fever:** 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. Other symptoms also include a red and swollen tongue and flushed cheeks.

Scarlet fever is spread via the mucus and saliva of infected people. It can also be caught from sharing drinking glasses, plates, utensils, toys and other items they have used.

Contact NHS 111 or your GP 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 or a bloodstream infection. 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. If no antibiotics have been administered, the individual will be infectious for 2 to 3 weeks and should stay at home for this period.

Children who have recently had/have influenza or chickenpox are more at risk of developing serious GAS infection during an outbreak of scarlet fever and so schools and parents should remain vigilant for symptoms such as a persistent high fever, cellulitis (skin infection) and arthritis (joint redness, pain or swelling).

**How do you get it?** 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. 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. 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. 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.

**Getting medical help:** As a parent, if you feel that your child seems unwell with any of the following, you should trust your own judgement and contact NHS 111 or your GP:

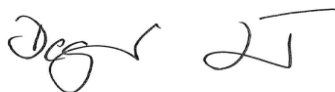
- Has symptoms of scarlet fever: sore throat, headache, and fever, along with a fine, pinkish or red body rash with a sandpapery feel
- your child is getting worse
- your child is feeding or eating much less than normal
- your child has had a dry nappy for 12 hours or more or shows other [signs of dehydration](#)
- 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

I hope this important information is helpful to keep you and your family safe and well over winter. Please find attached a fact sheet giving more information on ways to protect your child this winter.

Yours sincerely



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## **Fact sheet: Ways to protect your child this winter**

**1. Check your child is up to date with their vaccinations:** Vaccination is the best defence against severe illness to protect your child and also others by stopping outbreaks in nurseries and schools. Check their red book to make sure that your child is up to date with all of their routine childhood vaccines. Click on the link to see the full list of vaccines your child should have on the [NHS website vaccination schedule, including the flu vaccine.](#)

- **Flu vaccinations:** If your 2 or 3 year old child has not had their flu vaccine yet, please contact your GP practice to arrange one. For primary school and some secondary children who will be offered flu vaccinations in their schools in the coming weeks, please return the consent form as soon as possible. Eligible parents and carers are recommended to get the flu vaccination to protect themselves and others this winter. For more information on flu vaccination, eligibility and how to book, please visit: [Flu vaccine - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)
- **Polio booster:** An additional dose of the polio vaccine is being offered to children aged between 1 and 9, and live in London. This booster will provide a high level of protection from paralysis for your child and help to reduce the spread of the virus although the risk of contracting it, is low. 1-4 year olds can get this booster at their GP practice and children over 5 can attend one of the polio clinics to get vaccinated: [Extra polio vaccine dose for children \(London only\) - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#) This booster campaign will end by 23rd December. After this date the programme will return to the normal catch-up programme in general practice.

## **2. Teach your child how to wash their hands and cover their coughs and sneezes**

The good hygiene habits that were used to slow the spread of COVID-19 are important defences against a range of other infections, including respiratory infections and stomach bugs, like norovirus.

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.

## **3. Learn about other common infections**

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. Common infections in children include scarlet fever, flu and Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) - RSV is a common winter virus which affects children under the age of two. It can be more severe in premature babies, those under 2 months and those with underlying conditions.

#### **4.Support your child's school or nursery by keeping them off when needed**

**If your child tests positive for COVID-19:** If your child tests positive for COVID-19 they should stay at home for 3 days following their positive test. If they have, or subsequently develop symptoms, they should also wait until they are well. After 3 days, if they feel well and do not have a high temperature, the risk of passing the infection on to others is much lower and they can return to nursery/school as normal.

If your child has diarrhoea, vomiting or **high temperature and is unwell**, then they should not attend school or mix with others outside of school, until they no longer have a high temperature and are well enough to attend.

If your child has mild respiratory symptoms, like a runny nose, sore throat, or slight cough but are otherwise well, they can continue to attend their school or nursery.

More information about when to keep your child away from school or nursery is available here: [Is my child too ill for school? - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk)

For more information on how to protect your children this winter, please read: [5 ways to protect your under 5s this winter - UK Health Security Agency \(blog.gov.uk\)](https://blog.gov.uk)

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