

To: All Schools and Nurseries

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Dear Colleagues

**Re: Increase in scarlet fever**

I am writing to inform you that nationally, PHE has observed a sixth consecutive season of elevated scarlet fever activity since 2014. 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 an outbreak at your school or nursery.

**Signs and symptoms of scarlet fever**

Scarlet fever is a common childhood infection caused by *Streptococcus pyogenes*, or group A streptococcus (GAS). The early symptoms of scarlet fever include sore throat, headache, fever, nausea and vomiting. After 12 to 48 hours the characteristic red, pinhead rash develops, typically first appearing on the chest and stomach, then rapidly spreading to other parts of the body, and giving the skin a sandpaper-like texture. The scarlet rash may be harder to spot on the skin of some Black and Asian people, although the 'sandpaper' feel should be present. Patients typically have flushed cheeks and pallor around the mouth. This may be accompanied by a 'strawberry tongue'. As the child improves peeling of the skin can occur.

**Infection control advice**

In schools and nurseries it is recognised that 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 child care settings.

As per national *Guidance on Infection Control in Schools and other Child Care Settings*, 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 remains the most important step in preventing and controlling spread of infection.

**Recommended actions if you suspect an outbreak at your school or nursery:**

- **Contact** your Health Protection Team on 0300 303 8162 for advice
- Your Health Protection Team will provide you with a **letter** to cascade to staff and parents if appropriate

Although scarlet fever is usually a mild illness, patients can develop complications and if you have any concerns please contact your local Health Protection Team for advice.

**Resources:**

1. Scarlet fever FAQ: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/scarlet-fever-symptoms-diagnosis-treatment>
2. Guidance on health protection and managing cases of infectious diseases in schools and other childcare settings. Available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities>
3. Hand hygiene resources for schools: <http://www.e-bug.eu/>

Yours sincerely,



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Gloucestershire County Council



**Mike Wade**  
Deputy Director of Health Protection  
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