

London Borough of Waltham Forest
Waltham Forest Town Hall
Fellowship Square
London E17 4JF

Dear parent / carer,

Group A Strep is a common type of bacteria that causes mild illnesses like scarlet fever and strep throat. In a very small number of cases, this bacteria can cause a more serious illness, called “Invasive Group A strep”.

Levels of scarlet fever are higher than we usually see at this time of year. In addition, there have been some tragic stories around a small number of serious cases in the news, which we know will have a lot of you worried. While risks are still very low, we do want to give parents and carers information on what to be aware of, what to look out for, and what to do.

Scarlet fever is usually a mild illness, but it is highly infectious. Symptoms of scarlet fever (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/scarlet-fever/>) can include a sore throat, headache, fever, and a fine pink/red rash that feels rough to the touch, like sandpaper. On darker skin the rash can be harder to see but will have that sandpapery feel.

Contact NHS 111 or your GP if you think your child has scarlet fever. Early treatment with antibiotics can reduce the risk of complications and prevent it from spreading further. If your child has scarlet fever, keep them at home until at least 24 hours after starting antibiotics. Good handwashing and using a tissue for coughs and sneezes can really help to stop the spread too.

As you probably know from experience, fevers and other symptoms like sore throat and headache are very common in children, especially young ones. If there is no rash, these symptoms would be much more likely to be caused by another illness, likely a common virus.

In very rare circumstances, the bacteria that causes scarlet fever (Group A strep) can get into the blood and cause a serious illness, called invasive Group A strep. This doesn't happen very often; however, it is important to be on the lookout for symptoms and see a doctor as quickly as possible so that your child can be treated and we can stop the infection from becoming serious.

Make sure you talk to a health professional if your child is showing signs of deteriorating after a bout of scarlet fever, a sore throat, or a respiratory infection.

As a parent, if you feel that your child seems seriously unwell, you should trust your own judgment.

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

In the vast majority of cases, children with Group A strep will not develop invasive infection and will recover well at home after taking antibiotics.

There are other things that you can also do to reduce the risk of different illnesses this year:

1. Check your child is up to date with their vaccinations

Vaccination is the best way to protect against severe illness. Check your child's health record (red book) or contact your GP to find out if your child is up-to-date with their routine vaccinations. Visit <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/nhs-vaccinations-and-when-to-have-them/> to find out which vaccinations are given at which age.

There is no vaccination available for Group A strep or scarlet fever, but there are vaccinations available to protect children against other illnesses common in winter, including flu.

2. Take up additional vaccinations

An extra dose of the polio vaccine is available to children aged 1-9 in Waltham Forest. This is as a result of poliovirus being detected in local sewage. Visit nhs.uk/polio-sites to find local vaccination centres and pharmacies providing vaccination. Polio booster vaccinations are also available for children aged 6-9 at community clinics provided by Vaccination UK.

Parents of children aged 6-9 who haven't yet received their polio booster should email appointments@v-uk.co.uk or call 0208 017 4291 to arrange an appointment

3. Teach your child how to wash their hands and cover their coughs and sneezes

To reduce the risk of your child catching and spreading infections:

- Teach your child how to wash their hands properly with soap for 20 seconds
- Remind them to use a tissue to catch coughs and sneezes
- Make sure they keep away from others when feeling unwell.

4. Learn about the symptoms of common infections and what to do if they get worse

In addition to scarlet fever, there are several other infectious diseases which are more common in the Winter. It's helpful to know what to look out for and what to do if symptoms get worse.

Flu - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/flu/>

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bronchiolitis/>

Covid-19 - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/coronavirus-in-children/>

5. Support your child's school or nursery by keeping them off when needed

If your child has an infectious disease, they may pass it to others if they attend school or nursery – this can lead to larger outbreaks of disease in the borough. If your child has a tummy bug with vomiting and/or diarrhoea, keep them off school for 48 hours after symptoms have gone away.

Visit <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/is-my-child-too-ill-for-school/> to find out more about when to keep your child off school.

If you need any more information about common childhood illnesses and how to look after children when they are unwell, please visit <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/health/looking-after-a-sick-child/>

Kind regards,



Joe McDonnell
Director of Public Health
London Borough of Waltham Forest