

Scarlet Fever

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Scarlet fever is an illness caused by *Streptococcus A* bacteria (more commonly known as strep). The illness affects some people who have strep throat or skin infection caused by this bacteria. The strep bacteria produces poisons (toxins) which give the skin a red rash.

It is usually a mild illness, but people with scarlet fever need treatment to prevent serious health problems.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms usually start 1 to 3 days after contact with the bacteria. The illness usually begins with fever and a sore throat. There may also be vomiting and tummy pain.

The rash usually starts 1 to 2 days after the illness begins. It may first appear on the neck, underarms and groin, then spread over the body.

Usually the rash starts as small flat red blotches that gradually become small bumps with a rough surface. A child often gets a pink or red face, with a pale area around the mouth. Their tongue may get a white coating with red spots, often call "strawberry tongue". Once this coating comes off the tongue is bright red.

The scarlet fever rash usually fades in 7 days, and there is usually some skin peeling as the rash fades.



Symptoms can include:

- Rash (as described above);
- Fever;
- Sore throat;
- Nausea and vomiting; and
- Peeling of the skin (tips of fingers and toes).

How is it treated?

Antibiotics are used to treat the bacteria that cause scarlet fever.

Rest and extra water or other fluids are a good idea.

How serious is it?

Scarlet fever is usually a mild illness, but needs antibiotic treatment to stop serious complications such as kidney problems or Rheumatic Fever (which can affect the heart).

Who is most at risk?

Scarlet fever usually affects children under the age of 10 years, however anyone can be affected.

How is it spread?

People are infected with scarlet fever by:

- breathing in droplets from an infected person that are coughed or sneezed into the air;
- touching contaminated hands or food;
- touching things used by an infected person - such as cups, plates, and eating utensils.

How can scarlet fever be prevented?

There is no vaccine to prevent scarlet fever.

The best protection against scarlet fever is good hand washing. It is especially important for anyone with a sore throat to wash his or her hands often.

Avoid sharing towels, eating utensils (such as spoons, forks, knives, plates and cups) or other personal items.

Staying away from work, school or preschool

People with scarlet fever should stay home from school, preschool or work for at least 24 hours after starting antibiotics.

Where can I get further information?

Contact your doctor for further information on scarlet fever.

Acknowledgement: Adapted from a resource produced by the Hawke's Bay District Health Board.