

Birches Primary School

Information for Parents

Public Health Agency Press Release issued on 6 December 2022

Public urged to be alert to signs of group A strep

Parents and guardians are being urged to be alert for the signs of group A streptococcal (GAS) infections by the Public Health Agency (PHA).

Group A streptococcus bacteria usually cause a mild infection producing sore throats or scarlet fever that can be easily treated with antibiotics. In very rare circumstances, these bacteria can get into the bloodstream and cause serious illness – called invasive Group A strep (iGAS).

As well as an increase in notifications of scarlet fever, which is above the levels we usually see at this time of year, the PHA is also aware of a higher number of cases of iGAS being reported across the UK.

While iGAS is still uncommon, it is important that parents are on the lookout for symptoms of illnesses caused by group A streptococcus bacteria and seek medical advice so that their child can be treated appropriately and to help prevent the infection becoming serious.

- Scarlet fever is a bacterial illness that mainly affects children under 10 but people of any age can get it.
- It is not usually a serious illness, but can result in serious complications, therefore treatment with antibiotics is recommended. This helps to reduce the risk of complications and spread to others.
- In the early stages, symptoms 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.

The PHA is asking parents to contact their GP if they suspect their child has scarlet fever, because early treatment with antibiotics is important to reduce the risk of complications such as pneumonia or a bloodstream infection.

Dr Joanne McClean, Director of Public Health at the PHA, said: “Scarlet fever usually clears up after about a week, but anyone who thinks they or a child may have it should contact a GP for a diagnosis and appropriate treatment.

“To limit the spread of scarlet fever it is also important to practise good hygiene by washing hands with warm water and soap, not sharing drinking glasses or utensils, and covering the nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing. People should also stay away from nursery, school or work for 24 hours after taking the first dose of antibiotics.”

Don't put off seeking help if your child continues to get worse.

The symptoms of scarlet fever are non-specific in early illness and may include:

- sore throat;
- headache;
- high temperature;
- nausea and vomiting.

Further information about scarlet fever is available on the PHA website: www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/scarlet-fever



Scarlet fever

Signs & symptoms



The symptoms of scarlet fever are non-specific in early illness and may include;

- sore throat,
- headache,
- high temperature,
- nausea and vomiting.

After 12 to 48 hours the characteristic red, generalised pinhead rash develops, typically first appearing on the chest and stomach, rapidly spreading to other parts of the body, giving the skin a sandpaper-like texture.

Anyone who thinks they or a child may have it should contact a GP for a proper diagnosis and appropriate treatment.