

## Background

- Group A streptococcus (GAS) is a common bacteria. Lots of us carry it in our throats and on our skin and it doesn't always result in illness. However, GAS does cause a number of infections, some mild and some more serious.
- The most serious infections linked to GAS come from invasive group A strep, known as iGAS.
- These infections are caused by the bacteria getting into parts of the body where it is not normally found, such as the lungs or bloodstream. In rare cases an iGAS infection can be fatal.
- Whilst iGAS infections are still uncommon, there has been an increase in cases this year, particularly in children under 10 and sadly, a small number of deaths.

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## Background

- Investigations are underway following reports of an increase in lower respiratory tract Group A Strep infections in children over the past few weeks, which have caused severe illness.
- Currently, there is no evidence that a new strain is circulating. 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.

# Background

- Scarlet fever is usually a mild illness, but it is highly infectious.
- 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. Whilst still uncommon, there has been an increase in invasive Group A strep cases this year, particularly in children under 10.
- There were 2.3 cases per 100,000 children aged 1-4 compared to an average of 0.5 in the pre-pandemic seasons (2017 to 2019) and 1.1 cases per 100,000 children aged 5-9 compared to the pre-pandemic average of 0.3 (2017 to 2019) at the same time of the year.

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## Spread and prevention

- GAS is spread by close contact with an infected person and can be passed on through coughs and sneezes or from a wound.
- Some people can have the bacteria present in their body without feeling unwell or showing any symptoms of infections and while they can pass it on, the risk of spread is much greater when a person is unwell.
- Good hand and respiratory hygiene are important for stopping the spread of many bugs.
- By teaching your child how to wash their hands properly with soap and warm water 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.

## **Key messages: Symptoms**

**Look out for symptoms in your child, which include:**

- Sore throat
- Headache
- Fever
- 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.
- Contact NHS 111 or your GP if you suspect your child has scarlet fever, because early treatment 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.

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## Key Messages: Action

**As a parent, if you feel that your child seems seriously unwell, you should trust your own judgement. Contact NHS 111 if 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 38C, or is older than 3 months and has a temperature of 39C 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

## Key Messages: Action

### 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

