

14 December 2022

Dear Parent/Guardian,

This letter is to advise you that a number of children attending schools and nurseries across Dumfries and Galloway have been diagnosed with suspected or confirmed Group A streptococcal (Strep) infection. This reflects increased levels of Group A Strep infections circulating widely in communities in the region. The same pattern is also being seen across Scotland and the rest of the UK.

Group A Strep infections are very common in children, especially in the winter, and are generally fairly mild. The bacterium that causes Group A Strep infections is widespread, and is often found in people's throats and on their skin. Infections can be spread by respiratory droplets (coughing and sneezing), through direct physical contact and by shared contact with surfaces, such as tables, toys, door-handles etc. The spread of Group A Strep infections can be rapid in schools and nurseries due to close contact amongst children and staff, or if additional hygiene practises need to be put in place.

NHS Dumfries and Galloway's Health Protection team is monitoring the situation and is providing schools, nurseries and child-care providers with advice on minimising the spread of Strep A infections.

The Symptoms of Group A Strep infections, including Scarlet Fever

Group A Strep infections are easily treated with antibiotics by your GP. In rare cases, complications develop and a more serious illness occurs that needs rapid medical attention.

Group A Strep infections can cause a wide range of symptoms, including respiratory and skin infections, such as scarlet fever, 'strep throat', tonsillitis and impetigo. Although Group A Strep infections and scarlet fever are usually mild illnesses, prompt treatment with antibiotics will reduce the risk of complications and/or the infection spreading to others.

The symptoms of scarlet fever include a sore throat, headache, fever, nausea and vomiting. This is followed by a fine red rash which typically first appears on the chest and stomach, before rapidly spreading to other parts of the body. On more darkly-pigmented skin, the scarlet rash may be harder to spot, but it should feel like 'sandpaper'. The face can be flushed red but pale around the mouth. A white coating develops on the tongue, which peels a few days later leaving the tongue red and swollen (this is known as strawberry tongue).

If you think your child has a Group A Strep infection or scarlet fever:

- Your child should see their GP (or you should contact NHS 111) as soon as possible.
- The doctor will clinically assess your child to determine if their infection is viral or bacterial: a viral infection will not require treatment with antibiotics.
- If your doctor determines your child's infection is bacterial, like Group A strep, they will prescribe antibiotics. Make sure that your child takes the full course of these antibiotics to prevent them developing complications.
- Your child should stay at home (and away from nursery, school or child-minder) for at least 24 hours after starting the antibiotic treatment, to avoid spreading the infection.

Unless they have any symptoms, family or social contacts of a case do not need to isolate or stay away from nursery, school or child minder and do not need to be treated with antibiotics. However, if contacts develop any symptoms they should also follow the advice above.

In order to minimise the spread of scarlet fever and other Strep A infections, the following measures are recommended for everyone at school/nursery and in the home:

- a. Hand Hygiene - clean hands more frequently, using soap and water, throughout the day, especially after using the toilet, after play, and before or after eating.
- b. Respiratory Hygiene – everyone should cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when they cough and sneeze, and then wash their hands after using or disposing of tissues.
- c. All scrapes or wounds should be thoroughly cleaned with soap and warm water and covered with a plaster or dressing while at school or nursery.

Possible complications of Group A Strep infections

Chicken pox and other viral infections like seasonal influenza (flu) are also widely circulating across Dumfries and Galloway this winter. On rare occasions, children who have chickenpox or flu can develop more serious infection during an outbreak of scarlet fever, which can result in invasive Group A Strep. This is sometimes referred to as iGAS.

Parents should be vigilant for symptoms that may suggest invasive Group A Strep infection. These include your child:

1. feeling very unwell
2. having severe headaches
3. having severe pain in muscles or joints
4. vomiting
5. diarrhoea

Please note you can protect your child from flu and potential complications from Group A Strep infections by arranging for them to have a flu vaccine. This can be carried out at any of the drop-in vaccination centres in Dumfries and Galloway. Full details of the location and opening times for all drop-in vaccination centres are provided on the NHS Dumfries & Galloway website (<https://www.nhsdg.co.uk/vaccines/>).

Please avoid giving children who have chicken pox any pain/fever reducing products that contain ibuprofen. If you are concerned for any reason please seek medical assistance immediately.

If your child has an underlying condition which affects their immune system, you should contact their GP or hospital doctor to discuss whether any additional measures are needed.

You can find more information about Strep A infections, scarlet fever and chicken pox on NHS inform using the following link: www.nhsinform.scot

Yours sincerely,

Dr Regina McDevitt

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