

Symptoms of scarlet fever and when to contact the NHS

Scarlet fever is a contagious bacterial infection that mostly affects young children. It is easily treated with antibiotics. The first signs of scarlet fever can be flu-like symptoms, including high temperature, a sore throat and swollen neck glands (a large lump on the side of your neck).

The classic symptom is a rash that appears 12 to 48 hours later. **It looks like small, raised bumps and starts on the chest and tummy, then spreads. The rash makes the skin feel rough, like sandpaper.** On white skin the rash looks pink or red. It may be harder to see on brown and black skin, but you can still feel it.

A white coating may appear on the tongue. This peels, leaving the tongue red, swollen and covered in little bumps (called “strawberry tongue”). The rash does not appear on the face, but the cheeks can look red. The redness may be harder to see on brown and black skin.

Visit [NHS 111 online](#), call 111 or contact your GP if your child:

- Has scarlet fever symptoms
- Does not get better in a week (after seeing a GP)
- Has scarlet fever and chickenpox at the same time
- Is ill again, weeks after scarlet fever got better – this can be a sign of a complication, such as [rheumatic fever](#)
- Is feeling unwell and has been in contact with someone who has scarlet fever

If your child is unwell with a rash or fever then they should remain at home, and if they develop [scarlet fever symptoms](#) then contact [NHS 111 online](#), call NHS 111 or contact your GP. If your child is diagnosed with scarlet fever, they may return to the setting 24 hours after commencing antibiotic treatment. If they are diagnosed with scarlet fever but no antibiotics are administered, they may be infectious for up to 3 weeks and should be excluded for this period. If they are not diagnosed with scarlet fever they may return to the setting when their symptoms have resolved and they are well again.

In very rare occasions, the bacteria can get into the bloodstream and cause an illness called invasive Group A Strep (iGAS).

What to do if you feel your child seems seriously unwell

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