



Devon, Cornwall and Somerset
PHE Centre
Richmond Court, Emperor Way
Exeter Business Park Exeter, Devon
EX1 3QS

T +44 (0) 344 225 3557
F +44 (0) 1392 367 356
www.gov.uk/phe

To: School Nurses and Health Visitors
Devon, Cornwall and Somerset

24 March 2015

Dear Colleagues,

Re: National increase in scarlet fever

You may be aware that there has been an increase in notification of scarlet fever across the country in recent weeks. It occurs most often in the winter and spring, and a rise is expected around this time of year. Data from across England suggests that the number of cases is particularly high this year.

Scarlet fever is a common childhood bacterial infection caused by *Streptococcus pyogenes*, or group A streptococcus (GAS). The symptoms of scarlet fever include sore throat, headache, fever, nausea and vomiting. After 12 to 48 hours the characteristic red, pinhead rash develops, typically first appearing on the chest and stomach, then rapidly spreading to other parts of the body, and giving the skin a sandpaper-like texture. Patients typically have flushed cheeks and pallor around the mouth. This may be accompanied by a 'strawberry tongue'. Although scarlet fever is usually a mild illness, patients can develop complications.

Children and adults with suspected scarlet fever should contact their GP for a consultation and if provided with appropriate antibiotic treatment for a diagnosis of scarlet fever should be **excluded** from nursery / school / work for **24 hours** after the commencement of the treatment.

Infections can be spread through direct physical contact between children and staff and through shared contact with surfaces such as table tops, taps, toys and handles. Good hygiene practice such as hand washing remains the most important step in preventing and controlling spread of infection.

Please ensure that the local Public Health England Health Protection team in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset are aware of cases of scarlet fever; we can advise on the appropriate steps which may need to be taken. We can be contacted on 0344 2253557.

Resources;

PHE Scarlet fever; guidance and data <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/scarlet-fever-guidance-and-data>

NHS Choices <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/scarlet-fever/pages/introduction.aspx>

Yours sincerely

Dr Sarah Harrison
Deputy Director of Health Protection