

5<sup>th</sup> December 2022

Dear Parent/Carer

**Re: Elevated Levels of scarlet fever**

We continue to see elevated levels of scarlet fever cases (Group A Strep Infections) particularly in young children. We therefore urge you to be vigilant and look out for symptoms in your child, because early treatment of scarlet fever with antibiotics is important to reduce the risk of complications such as pneumonia or a bloodstream infection.

Scarlet fever is usually a mild illness, but it is highly infectious. It 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 (iGAS). While still uncommon, there has been an increase in invasive Group A strep cases this year, particularly in children under 10.

**Signs and symptoms of scarlet fever**

- The early 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.
- The scarlet rash may be harder to spot on darker skin, although the 'sandpaper' feel should be present. Patients typically have flushed cheeks and pallor around the mouth. This may be accompanied by a 'strawberry tongue'. As the child improves peeling of the skin can occur.
- [Scarlet Fever Factsheet](#): includes some useful information and images.

**What should I do if I suspect my child has scarlet fever?**

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 you suspect your child has scarlet fever
- 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.

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

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 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.

Further advice can be found online at [NHS UK](#) and [Winter vaccinations - NHS South East London \(selondonics.org\)](#)

### **Seasonal flu vaccination**

We are also seeing high levels of flu in the community. Some children are requiring hospital admissions. Flu is different from a common cold, and it occurs every year, usually in the winter. It is a highly infectious disease caused by the influenza virus. Flu vaccines offer the best protection against flu. Even those who had a flu vaccine last winter would need another one this year to stay protected.

### **How to get a flu vaccine for your child**

All children aged 2 & 3 years and primary school aged children (from reception to Year 6) are eligible for NHS flu vaccinations. Two and three year olds will be invited by their GPs and primary school children can get theirs at school as a nasal spray. If your child schools in Lambeth and has been offered the flu vaccine by the school-age provider (Hounslow & Richmond Community Healthcare NHS Trust), we encourage you to complete and return your child's consent form to the school as soon as possible.

If you're yet to hear from your child's school in Lambeth or if your child has missed the in-school vaccination session, you can contact the school-age provider directly on 020 8614 5495 / 020 8614 5496 to discuss. The team has arranged catch-up vaccination sessions in the community to ensure that no child is left out.

Take this opportunity to protect yourself, colleagues, friends, family, and service users from the flu.

[Find out more about the flu vaccine](#)

Yours Faithfully



Ruth Hutt  
Director of Public Health  
London Borough of Lambeth