



# Fact Sheet: Scarlet Fever

*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information, contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).*

## What is scarlet fever?

Scarlet fever occurs mainly in children ages 5 to 12 years old. People are infected with group A streptococci bacteria which is the same bacteria that cause strep throat. Many viruses and bacteria cause an illness that includes a red rash and sore throat. A doctor will determine which illness a person may have by swabbing the throat for strep throat. Scarlet fever can occur at any time of year but is more common in the colder seasons. Once a person has been infected with scarlet fever, they usually do not get it again.

## How does scarlet fever spread?

The bacteria are spread by direct contact with droplets from the nose, mouth, and/or throat of an infected person. Group A strep bacteria are very contagious. People are most contagious a day or two before the rash appears and for 4 to 5 days after. It usually takes two to five days for someone exposed to group A strep bacteria to become sick with strep throat or scarlet fever. People are contagious even with no symptoms. When treated with the proper medicine, people are no longer contagious after 24 hours.

## What are the symptoms of scarlet fever?

- Fever (101°F–105°F)
- Sore throat
- Tiny, red spots on the roof of the mouth, called petechiae
- Swollen lymph nodes in the front of the neck
- Flushing of the cheeks
- Fine red rash (which may feel like sandpaper) on the neck and upper body within 7 days
- Peeling of the skin after 5 to 10 days,

especially at the tips of fingers and toes, as rash begins to fade

- Whitish coating on the tongue, early in the illness
- Deep red (strawberry color) and bumpy appearance of tongue, later in the illness
- Sometimes vomiting

## How is scarlet fever treated?

It is important to finish all the medicine. Never share any of this medicine with family or friends. Ask a health care provider about over-the-counter medicine to lessen sore throat pain. In some cases, a single antibiotic injection may be recommended instead of oral medicine.

## How is scarlet fever prevented?

- There is no vaccine available to prevent scarlet fever. Good Hygiene is the best way from getting and or spreading group A strep
- Use tissues to catch coughs and sneezes, and immediately throw away tissues into the trash
- Wash hands after touching any nasal or oral secretions
- Wash hands after coughing or sneezing
- Wash hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- Use an alcohol-based hand rub if soap and water are not available
- Take antibiotics exactly as prescribed for treatment in completion
- Stay home from work, school, or daycare until no longer have a fever and antibiotics have been taken for 24 hours. Ask doctor how long to stay home after starting antibiotics