

**What is scarlet fever?**

Scarlet fever is a rash caused by the group A streptococcus bacteria. This is the same bacterium that causes strep throat. Scarlet fever usually occurs in people with strep throat but may be associated with other types of group A streptococcal infections. The rash of scarlet fever is usually seen in children younger than 18.

**Who is at risk for scarlet fever?**

Anyone can be at risk for scarlet fever. For the most part, humans are the only source of the bacteria.

**What are the symptoms of scarlet fever?**

Symptoms may include the following.

- Very sore throat that can have white or yellow patches.
- A rash first appearing as tiny red bumps on the chest and abdomen. The rash may then spread over the body, lasting about two to five days. After the rash, often the skin on the tips of the fingers and toes will peel.
- Flushed face with a pale area around the lips.
- Fever of 101 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, often with chills.
- Swollen glands in the neck.
- A whitish coating on the surface of the tongue. The tongue may look like a strawberry.

**How soon do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms of scarlet fever usually occur one to three days after being infected.

**How is scarlet fever infection spread?**

The bacterium that causes scarlet fever is spread through large respiratory droplets (coughing, sneezing) or direct contact with people who are ill. It is rarely spread by contacting surfaces or objects.

**When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?**

If left untreated, people can spread the bacteria for 10 to 21 days; in some cases, they may spread the bacteria for weeks or months. If treated, the ability to spread the illness to others usually ends after 24 hours.

**How is a person diagnosed?**

Usually, a rapid strep test is done by swabbing the throat. Culture tests in which the bacteria are grown are also commonly done.

### **What is the treatment?**

Penicillin or other antibiotics are used to treat scarlet fever. Make sure to follow all directions when taking antibiotics to reduce the chance of relapse.

### **Does past infection make a person immune?**

No.

### **Should children or others be excluded from child care, school, work or other activities if they have scarlet fever?**

People with strep throat should stay home until they have been on appropriate antibiotics for 24 hours. During an outbreak, people with sore throats should stay home until strep has been ruled out.

### **What can be done to prevent the spread of scarlet fever?**

People diagnosed with scarlet fever should take the appropriate antibiotics and remain at home for 24 hours. Wash hands often with soap and water or use a hand sanitizer. Always use appropriate respiratory etiquette, and don't share food or drinks.

### **Additional Information**

Additional information is available by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

#### Resource:

American Academy of Pediatrics. [Group A Streptococcal Infections.] In: Kimberlin DW, Brady MT, Jackson MA, Long SS, eds. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30<sup>th</sup> ed. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2015: 732-750.