



- **GP Leads and Practice Managers**
- **Primary Care Network Clinical Directors/Administrators**
- **Pharmacy networks**
- **Walk in centres/UCs**

14th Nov 2022

Dear Colleague,

Re: Update on seasonal activity of Scarlet Fever and Invasive Group A Streptococcal Infections

We wrote to you earlier this year to highlight the unusual GAS seasonal patterns. Given we are fast approaching the winter season we thought it would be timely to provide a further update, along with a reminder of the recommended GAS actions and highlight the revised resources.

Group A streptococcal infections: update on seasonal activity in England, 2021 to 2022¹

- Notifications and GP consultations of scarlet fever in England are higher in 2022 compared with the past 2 years and have remained elevated later in the season than expected.
- Notifications of invasive group A streptococcus (iGAS) disease followed a similar trend and remain higher than expected for this time of year.
- Although the iGAS cases season total is below average compared to the past 5 years, relatively higher levels in children are noted.
- The unusual seasonal pattern is a likely result of the withdrawal of measures implemented during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic to reduce transmission.

Recommended actions

Group A Strep

The following actions are recommended if scarlet fever or other GAS presentations are suspected:

- For a clinically suspected scarlet fever, antibiotics should be prescribed without waiting for a culture result– guidance on the clinical management of suspected scarlet fever infections, including prescribing guidelines is available on the NICE Clinical Knowledge Summaries website: <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/scarlet-fever/management/management/>
- Prompt treatment for scarlet fever with antibiotics is recommended to reduce the risk of complications and limit onward transmission.
- Advise exclusion from nursery/school/ work for at least 24 hours after the commencement of appropriate antibiotic treatment (we have also written to schools/early years settings to alert them to the situation and highlight relevant guidance. Patient leaflets are available link above.
- Consider taking a throat swab for culture of GAS to assist with differential diagnosis, for example to differentiate scarlet fever from measles or rubella, or if the patient is:
 - o thought to be part of an outbreak

o allergic to penicillin (GAS can be resistant to macrolides and clindamycin; determining antimicrobial susceptibility will facilitate an appropriate treatment).

o in regular contact with vulnerable individuals e.g., health and adult social care workers (people vulnerable to invasive GAS include those who are immunocompromised, have comorbidities, women in the late stage of pregnancy, or those with skin diseases).

Invasive Group A strep

- Given the potential for severe presentations in children, it remains important that scarlet fever cases are treated promptly with antibiotics to limit further spread and reduce risk of potential complications in cases and their close contacts.
- Clinicians should continue to be mindful of potential increases in invasive disease and maintain a high degree of clinical suspicion when assessing patients, particularly in relevant patients, such as those with recent chickenpox, women in the puerperal period and those with influenza, or close contacts of scarlet fever.
- Early recognition and prompt initiation of specific and supportive therapy for patients with iGAS infection can be lifesaving.
- Notify your Health Protection Team, including information on the school/nursery attended if relevant and indicate if any known co circulating infection*.

Yours faithfully

Dr Anita Bell

Consultant in Health Protection, London, UKHSA

* **How to contact your local health protection team (HPT)** Enter your postcode to get support and contact details for your local HPT here: <https://www.gov.uk/health-protection-team>

References/ Sources of information

1. Epi update: [Group A streptococcal infections: report on seasonal activity in England, 2021 to 2022 - GOV.UK](#)
2. Patient information
 - a. [Scarlet fever: symptoms, diagnosis and treatment - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
 - b. [Scarlet fever - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)
3. Group A streptococcal Infections: guidance and data [Group-a-streptococcal-infections-guidance-and-data](#)
4. Guidance for Health protection in education and childcare settings [Health-protection-in-schools-and-other-childcare-facilities](#)
5. Guidelines for the public health management of scarlet fever outbreaks in schools, nurseries and other childcare settings: [Management of scarlet fever outbreaks in schools](#)
6. [UKHSA Blog: 5 ways to protect your under 5s this winter - UKHSA \(blog.gov.uk\)](#)