

Scarlet Fever

Definition:

Scarlet fever is caused by the same type of bacteria that causes strep throat (group A streptococcus). In scarlet fever, the bacteria release toxins that produce the rash and red tongue.

Symptoms:

The signs and symptoms that give scarlet fever its name include:

- **Red rash.** The rash looks like a sunburn and feels like sandpaper. It typically begins on the face or neck and spreads to the trunk, arms, and legs. Pushing on the reddened skin makes it turn pale.
- **Red lines.** The folds of skin around the groin, armpits, elbows, knees, and neck usually become a deeper red than the other areas with the rash.
- **Flushed face.** The face may appear flushed with a pale ring around the mouth.
- **Strawberry tongue.** The tongue generally looks red and bumpy, often covered with a white coating early in the disease.

Signs and symptoms of scarlet fever also include:

- Fever of 38.0 C or higher, often with chills
- Very sore and red throat, sometimes with white or yellowish patches
- Difficulty swallowing
- Enlarged glands in the neck (lymph nodes) that are tender to the touch
- Nausea or vomiting
- Belly (abdominal) pain
- Headache and body aches

The time between exposure and illness is usually two to four days. A red rash usually appears one to two days after the illness begins. However, the rash can appear before illness or up to seven days later. The rash and the redness in the face and tongue usually last about a week. After these signs and symptoms have gone away, the skin affected by the rash often peels.

Transmission:

People can get scarlet fever more than once. Having scarlet fever does not protect someone from getting it again in the future, and there is no vaccine to prevent it. Generally, people spread the bacteria to others through respiratory droplets and direct contact.

Group A strep bacteria often live in the nose and throat. Infected people spread the bacteria by talking, coughing, or sneezing, which creates respiratory droplets that contain the bacteria. People can get sick if they:

- Breathe in respiratory droplets that contain the bacteria.

- Touch a surface containing respiratory droplets, then touch their mouth or nose.
- Drink from the same glass or eat from the same plate as a person infected with group A strep.

Other people can get sick if they:

- Touch sores on the skin caused by group A strep (impetigo: red sores or blister, usually on the child's mouth and nose).
- Come into contact with fluid from the sores.

Treatment:

- Take the antibiotics prescribed by your doctor.
- Use ibuprofen (Advil, others) or acetaminophen (Panadol, others) to control the fever and minimize throat pain.

Your child can return to school after taking antibiotics for at least 12 hours and no longer having a fever.