

SCARLET FEVER

What is it?

Scarlet fever is a fairly common childhood illness. It is caused by bacteria (streptococci) and is characterised by a rash. These bacteria more often cause just a sore throat.

How do you know if someone has it?

The main symptoms include a nasty sore throat and fever.

The rash is a fine, raised, red rash (feels like sandpaper) which disappears momentarily when pressed.

It appears most commonly on the neck, chest, under the arms, elbows and inner thighs. The rash does not usually affect the face which is flushed. During convalescence, the skin usually peels on the fingers and toes.

In addition there may be a white coating on the tongue, which peels a few days later, leaving the tongue looking red and swollen (known as 'strawberry tongue')

Is it infectious?

Yes, to close contacts of the patient and rarely by indirect contact through objects or hands.

What is the incubation period?

The time taken from contact with the germ until the illness starts is short, usually 1-3 days, rarely longer.

Is there any treatment?

Penicillin reduces the length of the illness and the possibility of rare complications. There are alternatives for people allergic to penicillin.

What should you do if someone has the illness?

Consult your doctor who will confirm the diagnosis and decide about treatment.

- The infected person should rest whilst they have a fever.
- Keep a child or adult with fever cool by reducing clothing and bed clothes and by giving paracetamol as prescribed on the bottle.
- If possible, babies and people with low resistance to infection should avoid contact with the infected person.

How soon can the person return to work/school setting?

People are infectious from the day the sore throat starts and are considered infectious for the first five days of antibiotic treatment. After that they can return when they feel well again.

