



## Scarlet Fever

### What is scarlet fever?

Scarlet fever is a bacterial infection caused by group A strep, the same type of bacteria that causes strep throat.

### What are the symptoms?

Common symptoms include:

- A red rash with a sandpaper feel that covers most of the body
- A very red, sore throat
- A fever of 101°F or above
- Bright red skin in the crease of the underarm, elbow, and groin areas
- A red and bumpy tongue
- A whitish coating on the tongue
- Swollen glands in the neck

Other general symptoms include:

- Headache and body aches
- Nausea, vomiting, or abdominal pain



### How is it spread?

Scarlet fever is spread through contact with droplets from an infected person's cough or sneeze. If you touch your mouth, nose, or eyes after coming into contact with these droplets, you may become infected. You can also get sick after sharing the same drinking glass or utensils with a sick person. It is possible to get scarlet fever from contact with sores from group A strep skin infections. For people diagnosed with scarlet fever, it is important for them to change their toothbrush after 1-2 days on antibiotics to avoid re-infecting themselves.

### Who gets scarlet fever?

Although anyone can get scarlet fever, children and some adults are more likely to get infected than others. It is most common in children between the ages of 5 and 15. Adults who are in contact with children are at higher risk for scarlet fever than other adults. Crowded conditions, such as schools and daycare centers, can increase the risk of spreading the infection.

### How is it diagnosed?

Scarlet fever can be diagnosed with a quick strep test or a throat culture. A strep test involves swabbing the throat and testing the swab to see if group A strep is causing the illness. If the rapid strep test is negative, but the healthcare provider still strongly suspects scarlet fever, a throat culture will be required.

### Is scarlet fever dangerous?

It is usually a mild illness, but it needs to be treated to prevent rare but serious long-term health problems. Some of the long-term health problems include:

- Rheumatic fever (an inflammatory disease that can affect the heart, joints, skin, and brain)
- Kidney disease (inflammation of the kidneys, called post-streptococcal glomerulonephritis)
- Arthritis (joint inflammation)
- Ear, skin, throat, or lung infections

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### **How is it treated?**

Scarlet fever can be treated with antibiotics. Antibiotics can help someone with scarlet fever feel better soon, prevent long-term health problems, and protect others from getting sick.

### **How can it be prevented?**

There is no vaccine to prevent scarlet fever. The best way to keep from getting or spreading the bacteria is to:

- Wash your hands often, especially after coughing or sneezing
- Wash glasses, utensils, and plates after someone who is sick uses them
- Stay home from work, school, or daycare until you no longer have a fever and have taken antibiotics for at least 24 hours
- Take antibiotics if infected.

