



Weill Cornell Medical College

ClinicalKey®

Patient Education:

Scarlet Fever, Pediatric

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Scarlet Fever, Pediatric

Scarlet fever is a bacterial infection that results from the bacteria that cause strep throat. It can be spread from person to person (*contagious*) through droplets from coughing or sneezing. If scarlet fever is treated, it rarely causes long-term problems.

CAUSES

This condition is caused by the bacteria called *Streptococcus pyogenes* or Group A strep. Your child can get scarlet fever by breathing in droplets that an infected person coughs or sneezes into the air. Your child can also get scarlet fever by touching something that was recently contaminated with the bacteria, then touching his or her mouth, nose, or eyes.

RISK FACTORS

This condition is most likely to develop in school-aged children.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of this condition include:

- Sore throat, fever, and headache.
- Swelling of the glands in the neck.
- Mild abdominal pain.
- Chills.
- Vomiting.
- Red tongue or a tongue that looks white and swollen.
- Flushed cheeks.
- Loss of appetite.
- A red rash.
 - The rash starts 1–2 days after the fever begins.
 - The rash starts on the face and spreads to the rest of the body.
 - The rash looks and feels like small, raised bumps or sandpaper. It also may itch.
 - The rash lasts 3–7 days and then it starts to peel. The peeling may last 2 weeks.
 - The rash may become brighter in certain areas, such as the elbow, the groin, or under the arm.

DIAGNOSIS

This condition is diagnosed with a medical history and physical exam. Tests may also be done to check for strep throat using a sample from your child's throat. These may include:

- Throat culture.
- Rapid strep test.

TREATMENT

This condition is treated with antibiotic medicine.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

Medicines

- Give your child antibiotic medicine as directed by your child's health care provider. Have your child finish the antibiotic even if he or she starts to feel better.
- Give medicines only as directed by your child's health care provider. **Do not** give your child aspirin because of the association with Reye syndrome.

Eating and Drinking

- Have your child drink enough fluid to keep his or her urine clear or pale yellow.
- Your child may need to eat a soft food diet, such as yogurt and soups, until his or her throat feels better.

Infection Control

- Family members who develop a sore throat or fever should go to their health care provider and be tested for scarlet fever.
- Have your child wash his or her hands often, wash your hands often, and make sure that all people in your household wash their hands well.
- Make sure that your child **does not** share food, drinking cups, or personal items. This can spread infection.
- Have your child stay home from school and avoid areas that have a lot of people, as directed by your child's health care provider.

General Instructions

- Have your child rest and get plenty of sleep as needed.
- Have your child gargle with 1 tsp of salt in 1 cup of warm water, 3–4 times per day or as needed for comfort.
- Keep all follow-up visits as directed by your child's health care provider.
- Try using a humidifier. This can help to keep the air in your child's room moist and prevent more throat pain.
- **Do not** let your child scratch his or her rash.

PREVENTION

- Have your child wash his or her hands well, and make sure that all people in your household wash their hands well.
- **Do not** let your child share food, drinking cups, or personal items with anyone who has scarlet fever, strep throat, or a sore throat.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your child's symptoms do not improve with treatment.

- Your child's symptoms get worse.
- Your child has green, yellow-brown, or bloody phlegm.
- Your child has joint pain.
- Your child's leg or legs swell.
- Your child looks pale.
- Your child feels weak.
- Your child is urinating less than normal.
- Your child has a severe headache or earache.
- Your child's fever goes away and then returns.
- Your child's rash has fluid, blood, or pus coming from it.
- Your child's rash is increasingly red, swollen, or painful.
- Your child's neck is swollen.
- Your child's sore throat returns after completing treatment.
- Your child's fever continues after he or she has taken the antibiotic for 48 hours.
- Your child has chest pain.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your child is breathing quickly or having trouble breathing.
- Your child has dark brown or bloody urine.
- Your child is not urinating.
- Your child has neck pain.
- Your child is having trouble swallowing.
- Your child's voice changes.
- Your child who is younger than 3 months has a temperature of 100°F (38°C) or higher.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

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