

SCARLET FEVER

What is scarlet fever?

Scarlet fever, also known as scarlatina, is a throat infection caused by bacteria (germs). These bacteria make a toxin that can cause a scarlet (red) rash on the skin. The rash of scarlet fever is usually seen in children less than 18 years. Scarlet fever is usually linked with a strep throat infection but it can also come from a wound infection. The disease is most common in children between 5 and 15 years.

What causes scarlet fever?

Scarlet fever is caused by a bacteria called group A streptococci. These bacteria also cause strep throat. In those with scarlet fever, the bacteria are found in the mouth and nose. Scarlet fever can be spread from an infected person to another by coughing, sneezing, or sharing food or drinks.

What are the signs and symptoms of scarlet fever?

The most common sign of scarlet fever is a rash. The rash first appears as tiny red bumps on the neck, chest, and abdomen, and then spreads all over the body. It looks like sunburn and feels like a rough piece of sandpaper and may last for six days. After the rash is gone, the skin on the tips of the fingers and toes usually begins to peel. Your child may also have one or more of the following signs and symptoms:

- Bright red lines under the arms and in the groin.
- Fever with chills.
- Headache and body aches and pain.
- Nausea (upset stomach) or vomiting (throwing up).
- Red and sore throat. The throat can also have white or yellow patches.
- Strawberry tongue (swollen, red tongue).

How is scarlet fever diagnosed?

A throat culture is done to check for scarlet fever. Throat culture results will help doctors choose what medicine is best for your child.

How is scarlet fever treated?

Antibiotic medicine is used if the throat culture shows that the streptococci bacteria are causing the infection. Give the antibiotics to your child **exactly** as recommended. It is very important to finish all of the antibiotics even if your child is feeling better.

What problems can scarlet fever cause?

- Heart or kidney diseases.
- Meningitis (swelling of the coverings of the brain and spinal cord).
- Otitis media (middle ear infection).
- Pneumonia (infection of the lungs).
- Sinusitis (swelling of the sinuses).
- Throat abscess. An abscess is a swelling under the skin that is infected and pus-filled.

How can scarlet fever be prevented?

- Ask your child's doctor if antibiotic medicine can be given to your child. Antibiotics may be given if your child has been exposed to someone with scarlet fever. Your child may also receive antibiotics if he has a weak immune system and has been exposed to scarlet fever.
- Have your child vaccinated (shots) against infections caused by viruses or bacteria.
- Keep your child away from people with scarlet fever, the flu, or a cold.
- Discard paper tissue after your child uses it to wipe or blow the nose.
- Wash your and your child's hands often with soap and water to prevent spreading or getting the infection.
- Family members and friends should not share eating or drinking utensils with your child.