



Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



Scarlet Fever

What is it?

Bacteria called group A *Streptococcus*, “group A”, or “strep”, cause scarlet fever. Sometimes the bacteria produce a toxin that causes a red skin rash, giving the name “scarlet” to scarlet fever. This infection is more common in children than adults. Complications are rare but can include lung infection, heart disease, and kidney disease.

How is it spread?

The bacteria that causes scarlet fever can spread from person to person through close, direct contact, such as when an infected person coughs or sneezes into the face of another. It can also be spread by oral contact, such as kissing or sharing drinks. The bacteria can survive outside of the body, so spread may also occur by touching contaminated objects (e.g. toys shared between children).

What do I look for?

Common signs of scarlet fever include a sore throat, “strawberry” (red and bumpy) tongue, skin rash that has a sandpaper feel, bright red skin in the creases of the underarm, elbow, and groin, fever, whitish coating on the tongue, and swollen glands in the neck. Depending on your skin tone, the rash can be red, pink, darker than or the same colour as surrounding skin. Other symptoms may include headache, body aches, nausea, vomiting, or abdominal pain.

The rash from scarlet fever fades in about 7 days. The skin may peel around the fingertips, toes, and groin area. The peeling can last up to several weeks.

How is it treated?

Scarlet fever is treated with antibiotics. People should stay home for 24 hours after treatment has been started, to limit the spread of the disease.

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If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.



How can I protect myself?

- Wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water or use hand sanitizer when hands are not visibly dirty.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow and encourage others to do the same.
- Wash your hands after handling nose and throat secretions (e.g. after throwing out facial tissues containing nose and throat secretions).
- Do not share water bottles, straws, eating utensils, cigarettes, toothbrushes, toys or anything else that has been in contact with saliva, nose or throat secretions.
- If you are ill, stay at home and isolate yourself from others.

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