



# Public Health Agency

## What is 'Group A Strep'?

Recently parents have been asked to be alert to signs of Group A Streptococcal infections, also known as 'Group A Strep'. This document gives some extra information on what to look out for.

## What is Group A Strep?

Group A Strep is a common bacteria that can live harmlessly in our throats and on our skin. Some Group A Strep can cause mild illnesses like sore throats or more serious illnesses like scarlet fever. These illnesses can be easily treated with antibiotics.

Rarely, Group A Strep causes very serious illness such as pneumonia (a bad chest infection), sepsis (when the infection gets into the blood) or bone infections. These very serious illnesses need hospital treatment.

It's important to remember that most sore throats and coughs are caused by viruses and will get better by themselves.

## How is Group A Strep spread?

Group A Strep spreads through sneezing, coughing and direct skin contact.

## What are the symptoms of Group A Strep?

### Mild Group A Strep can cause:

- a sore, red throat;
- fever;
- a white coating on the tongue;



- skin infections;
- scarlet fever. Scarlet fever starts with a sore throat, headache, fever and swollen neck glands, usually followed by a rash which sometimes feels like sandpaper, rashes can be harder to see on black or brown skin but you can still feel it.



**The more severe type of Group A Strep can cause:**

- high fever;
- severe muscle pain;
- pain, swelling and redness at site of wound;
- diarrhoea and vomiting.

**What should I do if my child has symptoms of Group A Strep?**

If your child has symptoms of Group A Strep, contact your GP or out-of-hours doctor. See [www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/gp-out-hours-service](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/gp-out-hours-service)

If your child is given antibiotics for Group A Strep they will need to stay off school for at least 24 hours.

Please seek urgent medical attention if:

- your child seems more unwell than usual;
- your child is getting worse;
- this is different to their normal coughs and colds.

**Can we do anything to stop Group A Strep spreading?**

Yes. Simple things make a big difference. Alongside regular hand washing with soap and water, you can reduce the chances of Group A Strep spreading by:

- catch it – use tissues when coughing or sneezing, and encourage your child to do the same;
- bin it – throw away used tissues in the bin;
- kill it – wash your hands with soap and hot water.

## **Vaccinations**

Make sure vaccines are up to date. Rises in recent cases of Group A Strep across the UK may be due in part to more social mixing, which may also result in other illnesses circulating at the same time.

The PHA would therefore urge everyone eligible for the free flu vaccine to get it at the earliest opportunity. In particular we would urge parents of all pre-school children aged two years and over and those aged 6 months to 2 years who are in risk groups to avail of the free flu vaccine.

Find out more about where to get vaccinated at [www.nidirect.gov.uk/wintervaccines](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/wintervaccines)