



UK Health
Security
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Carterhatch Junior School
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HPZ no: 380678

Dear Parent/Guardian

We have been informed that a number of children who attend Carterhatch Junior School have been diagnosed with suspected **scarlet fever and/or chickenpox**.

Chickenpox

Chickenpox is a mild and common childhood illness that most children catch at some point. It causes a rash of red, itchy spots that turn into fluid-filled blisters. They then crust over to form scabs, which eventually drop off. **To prevent spreading the infection, keep children off nursery or school until all the spots have crusted over.**

For most children, chickenpox is a mild illness that gets better on its own. But some children can become more seriously ill and need to see a doctor. Contact your GP straight away if your child develops any abnormal symptoms, for example:

- if the blisters on their skin become infected
- if your child has a pain in their chest or has difficulty breathing

Scarlet fever

Scarlet fever is also a mild childhood illness but unlike chickenpox, it requires antibiotic treatment. Symptoms include a sore throat, headache, fever, nausea and vomiting, followed by a fine red rash which typically first appears on the chest and stomach, rapidly spreading to other parts of the body. On more darkly-pigmented skin, the scarlet rash may be harder to spot, but it should feel like 'sandpaper'. The face can be flushed red but pale around the mouth. As the rash fades the skin on the fingertips, toes and groin area can peel.

If you think you, or your child, have scarlet fever:

- See your GP or contact NHS 111 as soon as possible
- Make sure that you/your child takes the full course of any antibiotics prescribed by the doctor.

- Stay at home, away from nursery, school or work for **at least 24 hours after starting the antibiotic treatment**, to avoid spreading the infection.

Complications

Children who have had chickenpox recently are more likely to develop more serious infection during an outbreak of scarlet fever and so parents should remain vigilant for symptoms such as a persistent high fever, cellulitis (skin infection) and arthritis. If you are concerned for any reason please seek medical assistance immediately.

If your child has an underlying condition which affects their immune system, you should contact your GP or hospital doctor to discuss whether any additional measures are needed.

You can find more information on chickenpox and scarlet fever on NHS choices:
www.nhs.uk.

Yours sincerely,

Katie Ferguson
Public Health Registrar
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General Information - Chickenpox (Varicella)



Chickenpox is a mild and common childhood illness that most children catch at some point.

It causes a rash of red, itchy spots that turn into fluid-filled blisters. They then crust over to form scabs, which eventually drop off.

Some children have only a few spots, but other children can have spots that cover their entire body. These are most likely to appear on the face, ears and scalp, under the arms, on the chest and belly, and on the arms and legs.

Chickenpox (known medically as varicella) is caused by a virus called the varicella-zoster virus. It's spread quickly and easily from someone who is infected.

Chickenpox is most common in children under the age of 10. In fact, chickenpox is so common in childhood that over 90% of adults are immune to the condition because they've had it before.

Children usually catch chickenpox in winter and spring, particularly between March and May.

What to do

To prevent spreading the infection, keep children off nursery or school until all their spots have crusted over.

Chickenpox is infectious from one to two days before the rash starts, until all the blisters have crusted over (usually five to six days after the start of the rash).

If your child has chickenpox, try to keep them away from public areas to avoid contact with people who may not have had it, especially people who are at risk of serious problems, such as newborn babies, pregnant women and anyone with a weakened immune system (for example, people having cancer treatment or taking steroid tablets).

Chickenpox treatment

Chickenpox in children is considered a mild illness, but your child will probably feel pretty miserable and irritable while they have it. Your child may have a fever for the first few days of the illness. The spots can be incredibly itchy.

There is no specific treatment for chickenpox, but there are pharmacy remedies that can alleviate symptoms. These include paracetamol to relieve fever, and calamine lotion and cooling gels to ease itching.

In most children, the blisters crust up and fall off naturally within one to two weeks.

When to see a doctor

For most children, chickenpox is a mild illness that gets better on its own.



However, some children can become more seriously ill with chickenpox and need to see a doctor.

Contact your GP straight away if your child develops any abnormal symptoms, such as:

- if the blisters on their skin become infected
- if your child has a pain in their chest or has difficulty breathing

Chickenpox in adults

Chickenpox may be a childhood illness, but adults can get it too. Chickenpox tends to be more severe in adults than children, and adults have a higher risk of developing complications.

Adults with chickenpox should stay off work until all the spots have crusted over. They should seek medical advice if they develop any abnormal symptoms, such as infected blisters.

Who's at special risk?

Some children and adults are at special risk of serious problems if they catch chickenpox.

They include:

- pregnant women
- newborn babies
- people with a weakened immune system

These people should seek medical advice as soon as they are exposed to the chickenpox virus or they develop chickenpox symptoms.

They may need a blood test to check if they are protected from (immune to) chickenpox.

Chickenpox in pregnancy

Chickenpox occurs in approximately 3 in every 1,000 pregnancies. It can cause serious complications for both the pregnant woman and her baby.

Chickenpox and shingles

Once you have had chickenpox, you usually develop antibodies to the infection and become immune to catching it again. However, the virus that causes chickenpox, the varicella-zoster virus, remains inactive (dormant) in your body's nerve tissues and can return later in life as an illness called shingles.

It's possible to catch chickenpox from someone with shingles, but not the other way around.

Is there a vaccine against chickenpox?

There is a chickenpox vaccine, but it is not part of the routine childhood vaccination schedule. The vaccine is only offered to children and adults who are particularly vulnerable to chickenpox complications.

The recommended two doses of the vaccine is estimated to offer 98% protection from chickenpox in children and 75% protection in adolescents and adults.

So it may be possible to develop the infection after vaccination. Similarly, there is a chance that someone who has received the vaccine could develop chickenpox after coming in close contact with a person who has shingles.



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Scarlet fever

Scarlet fever (sometimes called scarlatina) is an infectious disease caused by bacteria called *Streptococcus pyogenes*, or group A streptococcus (GAS). The same bacteria can also cause impetigo.

Scarlet fever is characterised by a rash, which usually accompanies a sore throat. Bacteria that cause the infection produce toxins (poisons), which cause the rash, a red and swollen tongue and flushed cheeks. The scarlet fever rash can be confused with measles.

Scarlet fever is mainly a childhood disease and is most commonly seen between the ages of 2 and 8 years. Although historically considered a dangerous disease, it is now much less serious. Since 2014, a rise in numbers of cases has been seen with 15,000 to 30,000 cases currently diagnosed each year in England.

Scarlet fever is highly contagious and is spread by close contact with someone carrying the bacteria. It takes around 2 to 5 days to develop symptoms after exposure to these bacteria.

If you think you or your child has scarlet fever, you should consult your GP.

The disease tends to be most common in the winter and spring and the treatment consists of a course of antibiotics.

Protection from scarlet fever

Scarlet fever is spread via the mucus and saliva of infected people. It can also be caught from sharing drinking glasses, plates or utensils they have used. To protect yourself from getting the illness you should:

- wash your hands often
- not share eating utensils with an infected person
- wash, or dispose of, handkerchiefs and tissues contaminated by an infected person
- be aware that you can catch scarlet fever by inhaling contaminated airborne droplets, if someone with the illness coughs or sneezes in the air near you.

If you think you, or your child, have scarlet fever:

- see your GP or contact NHS 111 as soon as possible
- make sure that you/your child take(s) the full course of any antibiotics prescribed. Although you or your child will feel better soon after starting the course of antibiotics, you must complete the course to ensure that you do not carry the bacteria in your throat after you have recovered

- stay at home, away from nursery, school or work for at least 24 hours after starting the antibiotic treatment, to avoid spreading the infection

You can help stop the spread of infection through frequent hand washing and by not sharing eating utensils, clothes, bedding and towels. All contaminated tissues or handkerchiefs should be washed or disposed of immediately.

Symptoms

Scarlet fever symptoms:

- the first symptoms of scarlet fever often include a sore throat, headache, fever, nausea and vomiting.
- after 12 to 48 hours the characteristic fine red rash develops (if you touch it, it feels like sandpaper). Typically, it first appears on the chest and stomach, rapidly spreading to other parts of the body. On more darkly-pigmented skin, the rash may be harder to spot, although the 'sandpaper' feel should be present
- fever over 38.3° C (101° F) or higher is common
- white coating on the tongue, which peels a few days later, leaving the tongue looking red and swollen (known as 'strawberry tongue')
- swollen glands in the neck
- feeling tired and unwell
- flushed red face, but pale around the mouth. The flushed face may appear more 'sunburnt' on darker skin
- peeling skin on the fingertips, toes and groin area, as the rash fades

It usually takes 2 to 5 days from infection before the first symptoms appear. However, the incubation period may be as short as 1 day and as long as 7 days.

Scarlet fever usually clears up after a week, but it is advisable to visit your GP to get a full diagnosis and proper treatment.

Getting scarlet fever

Scarlet fever is highly contagious. Bacteria are present in the mouth, throat or nose of an infected person, or someone carrying the bacteria without symptoms, and are spread by contact with that person's mucus or saliva. This might be on cups, plates, pens, toys or surfaces, such as tables which might have been used or touched by someone carrying the bacteria. You can also catch the disease by breathing infected airborne droplets produced by a person's coughing, sneezing or normal breathing.