

Scarlet Fever

Symptoms of scarlet fever

The symptoms of scarlet fever usually take two to five days to appear after infection.

However, the incubation period (the time between exposure to the infection and symptoms starting) can be as short as one day or as long as seven days.

The symptoms of scarlet fever include a sore throat, headache, high temperature (38.3C/101F) or above), flushed face and swollen tongue. The distinctive pink-red rash develops 12 to 48 hours later.

Rash

Red blotches are the first sign of the rash. These turn into a fine pink-red rash that feels like sandpaper to touch and looks like sunburn. It may also be itchy.

The rash usually starts on the chest and stomach, but soon spreads to other parts of the body, such as the ears, neck, elbows, inner thighs and groin.

The rash doesn't usually spread to the face. However, the cheeks become flushed and the area just around the mouth stays quite pale. The rash will turn white if you press a glass on it.

The rash usually fades after about a week, but the outer layers of skin, usually on the hands and feet, may peel for several weeks afterwards.

In milder cases, sometimes called scarlatina, the rash may be the only symptom.

Other symptoms

Other symptoms may include:

- swollen neck glands
- loss of appetite
- nausea or vomiting
- red lines in the folds of the body, such as the armpit, which may last a couple of days after the rash has gone
- a white coating on the tongue, which peels a few days later leaving the tongue red and swollen (this is known as strawberry tongue)
- a general feeling of being unwell

Treating scarlet fever

Scarlet fever used to be a very serious illness, but nowadays most cases tend to be mild.

It can easily be treated with antibiotics. Liquid antibiotics, such as penicillin or amoxicillin, are often used to treat children. These must be taken for 10 days, even though most people recover after four to five days.

It's important to be aware that your child will still be infectious for 24 hours after antibiotic treatment has begun, and therefore they shouldn't attend school during this period

Without antibiotic treatment, your child will be infectious for 1-2 weeks after symptoms appear.

Stopping scarlet fever spreading:

There's currently no vaccine for scarlet fever.

If your child has scarlet fever, keep them away from school for at least 24 hours after starting treatment with antibiotics. Adults with the illness should also stay off work for at least 24 hours after starting treatment.

Children and adults should cover their mouth and nose with a tissue when they cough or sneeze and wash their hands with soap and water after using or disposing of tissues.

Avoid sharing contaminated utensils, cups and glasses, clothes, baths, bed linen or towels.