

Information

Sheet Number:

2022-27/35



for County Councillors

Official - Sensitive

From:	Alison Bell, Consultant in Public Health	
Relevant SLT Director and sign-off date:	Professor Trudi Grant, Director of Public Health	
Date:	12/12/2022	
To:	All County Councillors	

Group A Strep – What you need to know

Group A Streptococcus (GAS), also referred to as Strep A is a common bacterium. Lots of us carry it in our throats and on our skin but it doesn't always result in illness. GAS can cause a number of infections, some mild such and some more serious.

The most serious infections linked to GAS come from invasive group A strep, known as iGAS. These infections are caused by the bacteria getting into parts of the body where it is not normally found, such as the lungs or bloodstream. In rare cases an iGAS infection can be fatal. iGAS infections are still uncommon, but there has been an increase in cases this year, particularly in children under 10 and sadly, a small number of deaths in England.

How is it spread?

GAS is spread by close contact with an infected person and can be passed on through coughs and sneezes or from a wound. Some people can have the bacteria present in their body without feeling unwell or showing any symptoms of infections, whilst they can pass it on, the risk of spread is much greater when a person is unwell.

Which infections does GAS cause?

GAS causes infections in the skin, soft tissue and respiratory tract. It's responsible for infections such as tonsillitis, pharyngitis, [scarlet fever](#), impetigo and cellulitis among others. While infections like these can be unpleasant, they rarely become serious.

then treated with antibiotics, an unwell person with a mild illness like tonsillitis stops being contagious around 24 hours after starting their medication.

We are currently seeing high numbers of scarlet fever cases. More information on scarlet fever can be found on the [NHS website](#), including photos.

What is being done to investigate the rise in cases in children?

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) are undertaking investigations following reports of an increase in lower respiratory tract Group A Strep infections in children over the past few weeks, which have caused severe illness.

Currently, there is no evidence that a new strain is circulating. The increase is most likely related to high amounts of circulating bacteria. It isn't possible to say for certain what is causing higher than usual rates of these infections. There is likely a combination of factors, including increased social mixing compared to the previous years as well as increases in other respiratory viruses.

Who needs to take antibiotics?

Antibiotics are not routinely recommended as a preventative treatment and should only be taken in confirmed cases of scarlet fever or another GAS infection. If there are cases identified in a child's class, any child showing symptoms should be assessed by a doctor/by their GP and will be prescribed antibiotics if needed. Children are not infectious after 24 hours on treatment and can return to school once they're feeling well enough after this period.

How can we stop infections from spreading?

Good hand and respiratory hygiene are important for stopping the spread of many bugs. By teaching your child how to wash their hands properly with soap and warm water for 20 seconds, using a tissue to catch coughs and sneezes, and keeping away from others when feeling unwell, they will be able to reduce the risk of picking up, or spreading, infections.

The Somerset Situation:

We have been notified of 4 outbreaks of scarlet fever in the last 2 weeks in early years and school settings. There are likely to be more outbreaks that have not been reported. A couple of children have been admitted to hospital with iGAS in Somerset, thankfully they are now recovering and there have been no deaths of children.

All schools have been reminded of the actions to take to prevent and respond to cases and information has been cascaded to parents through schools – [a link](#) of the letter is available here as part of our Somerset health protection school's toolkit. We have also been working with NHS colleagues to ensure they are planning for this increase in cases and that messages to the public are joined up

For more information please contact:	Name: Alison Bell Email: alison.bell@somerset.gov.uk
--------------------------------------	--

