



People Directorate

Public Health Department

Salford City Council, Unity House

Civic Centre, Chorley Road

Swinton, Manchester M27 5AW



Phone 0161 793 3585



Fax: 0161 793 3578



Email: phsecretary@salford.gov.uk



Web: www.salford.gov.uk

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Dear Parent/Guardian,

Public Health wrote to you in April to advise you of the increase in Scarlet fever and Chickenpox cases in nursery and primary school age children. While cases did reduce over the summer, we are still seeing many more cases than in previous years. The number of cases can increase further as children return to school.

The concern is the bacteria that causes Scarlet fever (group A streptococcus) could complicate other skin infections such as chickenpox.

Children who have had chickenpox recently or have both infections together are more likely to develop more serious infection of Scarlet fever and so parents should remain vigilant for symptoms such as:

- a persistent high fever
- cellulitis (skin infection)
- and arthritis
- ear infection
- throat abscess
- inflammation of the sinuses (sinusitis)
- pneumonia
- increased risk of septicemia and meningitis

If you are concerned for any reason, please seek medical assistance immediately.

The vast majority of children will not develop complications from Scarlet fever and go on to make a full recovery and will usually return to school 24 hours after starting antibiotics.

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, this is usually 5 days after the spots first appeared.

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
- if you are concerned your child has chickenpox and Scarlet fever together or following closely after each other (see below)

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
- Cases of Scarlet fever should be treated with antibiotics to reduce the risk of complications and onward transmission. If a child has symptoms of Scarlet fever, it is important that they see their GP
- Children can return to their setting 24 hours after commencing antibiotic treatment (so long as they are well enough to do so). If no antibiotics are administered, they will be infectious to others for 2-3 weeks and so will require an extended isolation period

Some simple steps that we can all take to help reduce the onward transmission of any infectious disease, are:-

- **Maintain good ventilation**

Ventilation is the process of bringing fresh, outdoor air inside and letting indoor air outside in order to maintain or improve air quality.

Open windows or doors whenever possible. This helps to carry away the infectious droplets that may have been coughed, sneezed or breathed out. If the temperature outside is extremely hot or cold, you can open windows for a few minutes every hour to bring in fresh air.

- **Making sure your child is fully vaccinated**

Vaccination is the most important thing we can do to protect ourselves and our children against ill health. Vaccines prevent up to 3 million deaths worldwide every year. They protect you and your child from many serious and potentially deadly diseases. Protect other people in your community – by helping to stop diseases spreading to people who cannot have vaccines. For further information please visit [Vaccinations - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk).

- **Frequent and effective handwashing**

Washing your hands for 15-30 seconds with soap and water, helps remove dirt, viruses and bacteria, to stop them infecting you and also preventing you from spreading illnesses to others.

You should wash your hands:

- after using the toilet or changing a nappy
- before and after handling raw foods like meat and vegetables
- before eating or handling food
- after blowing your nose, sneezing, or coughing
- before and after treating a cut or wound
- after touching animals, including pets, their food and after cleaning their cages

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'B Wasp'.

Beverley Wasp
Head of Health Protection