

---

# Scarlet Fever

## *What You Need to Know*

---



### **What is scarlet fever?**

Scarlet fever is a bacterial infection caused by group A strep that affects some people with strep throat infection. Scarlet fever can occur at any age but is most common in school-age children between 5 and 15 years old.

### **What are the symptoms of scarlet fever?**

- A very red, sore throat
- A fever (101° F or above)
- A red rash with a sandpaper feel that may first appear on the neck, underarm, and groin, then spread over the body. Typically the rash begins as small, flat red blotches.
- Bright red skin in underarm, elbow and groin creases
- A whitish coating on the tongue or back of the throat
- A “strawberry” tongue (red and bumpy appearance)
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Swollen glands
- Body aches

### **How is scarlet fever spread?**

Group A strep bacteria are spread through contact with droplets from an infected person’s sneeze or cough. It is sometimes spread by indirect contact with objects such as drinking from the same glass, or eating from the same plate as a sick person. It is also possible to get scarlet fever from contact with sores from group A strep skin infections.

### **How is scarlet fever diagnosed?**

An illness that includes a red rash and sore throat can be caused by many viruses and bacteria. It is important to determine if group A strep is the cause. A rapid strep test or a throat culture is needed. If the test is positive, healthcare providers will prescribe antibiotics.

### **What is the treatment for scarlet fever?**

Antibiotics help shorten how long someone is sick, prevent spreading the disease to others, and prevent getting complications from the disease.

### **How long is a person contagious?**

People with scarlet fever should stay home from work, school, or daycare until they have taken antibiotics for at least 24 hours to prevent spreading the infection to others.

## What are the complications of scarlet fever?

Complications can occur if the bacteria spread to other parts of the body. Long-term health problems may include rheumatic fever, kidney disease, ear and skin infections, abscesses of the throat, pneumonia, and arthritis.

## How is scarlet fever prevented?

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, or cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow, not your hands, if you don't have a tissue.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Use an alcohol-based hand rub if soap and water are not available.
- Do not share eating utensils with someone who is sick with strep throat.
- Wash glasses, utensils and plates after someone who is sick uses them.



NURSE ON CALL PUBLIC HEALTH INFORMATION HOTLINE  
800.848.5533 NOC@OAKGOV.COM  
OAKGOV.COM/HEALTH



@PUBLICHEALTHOC

The Oakland County Health Division will not deny participation in its programs based on race, sex, religion, national origin, age or disability. State and federal eligibility requirements apply for certain programs.