

Scarlet Fever

What is scarlet fever?

Scarlet fever is a strep throat infection with a rash. Your child will have a sore throat and fever before the rash (usually 18 to 24 hours before). Once your child gets the rash, it will cover all areas within 24 hours.

Your child will have:

- Reddened, sunburned-looking skin (especially on the chest and abdomen) that feels rough, somewhat like sandpaper. On close inspection, the redness is speckled (tiny pink dots).
- Increased redness in skin folds (especially the groin, armpits, and elbow creases).
- Flushed face with paleness around the mouth.

What is the cause?

Scarlet fever is caused by the strep bacteria. The rash is caused by a toxin that is produced by some strep bacteria. The complication rate is no different than the complication rate for strep throat alone.

How long does it last?

The red rash usually clears in 4 or 5 days. Sometimes the skin peels in 1 to 2 weeks where the rash was most prominent (for example, the groin). The skin on the fingertips also commonly peels. Your child will stop having a sore throat and fever after taking an antibiotic for 1 or 2 days.

How can I take care of my child?

- **Antibiotics** your child must be seen in the office. If they test positive for strep throat they will be given a prescription of oral antibiotics.
- **Relief of sore throat or fever** Acetaminophen or ibuprofen is very helpful for throat pain. Children over 1 year old can sip warm chicken broth or apple juice. Children over 4 years old can suck on hard candy or lollipops. Also give acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil) for fevers over 102°F (39°F).
- **The rash** The rash itself needs no treatment. It generally clears in 4 to 5 days.
- **Contagiousness** Your child is no longer contagious after he or she has been on an antibiotic for 24 hours. Therefore, your child can return to school after 1 day if he or she is feeling better. The rash itself is not contagious.
- **Throat cultures for the family** Scarlet fever and strep throat can spread to others in the family. Any child or adult who lives in your home and has a fever, sore throat, runny nose, headache, vomiting, or sores; or who doesn't want to eat; or who develops these symptoms in the next 5 days should be seen by their provider. We do not treat siblings without seeing them first.
- **Sterilize or throw away toothbrushes and anything that goes in your child's mouth 24hrs after the start of antibiotics to prevent reinfection.**
- **Recurrent strep throat and repeat cultures** Usually repeat throat cultures are not necessary if your child takes all of the antibiotic. However, about 10% of children with strep throat don't respond to initial antibiotic treatment. Therefore, if your child continues to have a sore throat or mild fever after treatment is completed, return for a second throat culture. If it is positive, your child will be retreated with a different antibiotic.

When should I call my child's health care provider?

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- Your child starts acting very sick.

Call during office hours if:

- The fever lasts over 48 hours after your child starts taking the antibiotic.
- You have other concerns or questions.

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