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Protecting and improving the nation's health

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Dear colleagues,

**Re: Increase in Scarlet fever and Chickenpox**

You should be aware that there has been an increase in notification of scarlet fever across the country in recent weeks. It occurs most often in the winter and spring, and a rise is expected around this time of year. Data from across England suggests that the number of cases is particularly high this year.

A combination of scarlet fever and chickenpox is currently being reported by some schools and nurseries in the South West. This is of concern because children who have had chickenpox recently are slightly more likely to develop more serious infection during an outbreak of scarlet fever.

**Please contact** the local Public Health England Health Protection team on 0344 2253557 if you become aware of cases of scarlet fever in your school; and also if you have both scarlet fever and chickenpox circulating. Public Health England Health Protection Team will advise on the appropriate steps which may include writing to parents.

**Scarlet fever** is a common childhood bacterial infection caused by *Streptococcus pyogenes*, or group A streptococcus (GAS). The symptoms of scarlet fever include sore throat, headache, fever, nausea and vomiting. After 12 to 48 hours the characteristic red, pinhead rash develops, typically first appearing on the chest and stomach, then rapidly spreading to other parts of the body, and giving the skin a sandpaper-like texture. Patients typically have flushed cheeks and pallor around the mouth. This may be accompanied by a 'strawberry tongue'. Although scarlet fever is usually a mild illness, patients can develop complications.

Children and adults with suspected scarlet fever should contact their GP for a consultation and if provided with appropriate antibiotic treatment for a diagnosis of scarlet fever should be **excluded** from nursery / school / work for **24 hours** after the commencement of the treatment.

**Chickenpox** is usually 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 that crust over to form scabs. To prevent spreading the infection, children should stay away from the nursery or school until all spots have crusted over.

Infections can be spread through direct physical contact between children and staff and through shared contact with surfaces such as table tops, taps, toys and handles. Good hygiene practice such as hand washing remains the most important step in preventing and controlling spread of infection.



Public Health  
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Resources:

PHE Scarlet fever; guidance and data <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/scarlet-fever-guidance-and-data>

NHS Choices <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/scarlet-fever/pages/introduction.aspx>

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/chickenpox/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

Yours sincerely

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