

# Scarlet Fever

## FACT SHEET



Washtenaw County  
Health Department

### What is scarlet fever?

Scarlet fever occurs mainly in children 5 - 12 years old who are infected with group A streptococci bacteria. These are the same bacteria that cause strep throat. Scarlet fever can occur at any time of year, but is more common in the colder seasons. Once a person has had scarlet fever, they usually do not get it again.

### What are the symptoms?

- Fever (101°F–105°F)
- Sore throat
- Flushing of the cheeks
- Fine red rash (which may feel like sandpaper) on the neck and upper body within 7 days
- Peeling of the skin after 5-10 days, especially at the tips of fingers and toes
- Sometimes vomiting
- Tongue with deep red and bumpy appearance

### How is it spread?

The bacteria are spread by droplets from the nose, mouth, and throat and by direct contact with infected persons. People are most contagious a day or two before the rash appears and for 4-5 days after. **When treated with the proper medicine, people are no longer contagious after 24 hours.**

### How is it treated?

- Call your doctor if you think you have been exposed.
- If antibiotics are prescribed, take all the medicine as directed, even if you start to feel better.
- Rest.
- Drink plenty of fluids (water, juice, etc.).

### What are the serious complications?

Most cases of scarlet fever are mild and the disease itself should be of no major concern if treated properly. Two major complications could be acute rheumatic fever (affects the joints and heart) and/or acute kidney disease. Watch for these additional symptoms and seek treatment immediately if they develop:

- High fever (greater than 102 °F)
- Joint pain and swelling
- Blood in the urine
- Earache
- Inflamed glands of the neck
- Skin infection
- Pneumonia

### How is it prevented?

- Use tissues to catch coughs and sneezes and throw away tissues in trash.
- Wash hands after touching any nasal or oral secretions
- Wash your children's hands after coughing or sneezing

*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).*