



Central Michigan District Health Department

Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities



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Scarlet Fever

What is Scarlet Fever?

Scarlet Fever is generally a mild infection caused by the Group A streptococci bacteria. The bacteria sometimes make a poison (toxin), which causes a rash-the “scarlet” of scarlet fever.

What are the symptoms?

Illness begins with a fever and sore throat. There may also be chills, vomiting, or abdominal pain. At first, the tongue is coated white. It sheds the white coating by the fourth or fifth day leaving a “strawberry - like” (red and bumpy) appearance. The throat and tonsils may be very red and sore, and swallowing may be painful. One or two days after the illness begins, a red rash usually appears. However, the rash can appear before illness or up to 7 days later. The rash may first appear on the neck, underarm, and groin. The rash usually begins as small, flat blotches that slowly become fine bumps that feel like sandpaper.

How does it spread?

Scarlet Fever is spread through respiratory droplets of an infected individual, for example, when a person coughs or sneezes. Those droplets can get into the nose and/or mouth on a health person.

What is the treatment?

Scarlet fever is treated with antibiotics. About 24 hours after the antibiotic is taken, a person with scarlet fever is no longer able to pass on the bacteria to others. Taking antibiotics also prevents a person with scarlet fever from getting rheumatic fever (a non-contagious acute fever marked by inflammation and pain in the joints), which is a potential complication for a person who has scarlet fever.

What can I do to protect myself?

If you had scarlet fever, you are not immune to it. You can get it again. The best way to keep from getting the Group A streptococci bacteria (that causes scarlet fever) is to:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Put your used tissue in the waste basket.
- Cough and 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.
- Wash glasses, utensils, and plates after someone who is sick uses them.