



PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUTS

Scarlet Fever

Topic Overview

What is scarlet fever?

Scarlet fever is a term used for [strep throat](#) with a rash. Strep throat is a throat infection caused by a type of *streptococcal* bacteria.

What causes scarlet fever?

Scarlet fever is caused by streptococcal (strep) bacteria, the same bacteria that cause strep throat. There are many different strains of strep bacteria, some of which cause more serious illness than others. The type of strep that infects the throat and causes scarlet fever is called group A beta-hemolytic streptococcus (GABS).

What are the symptoms of scarlet fever?

Symptoms that may occur before the rash include:

- Fever of 101°F (38.33 °C) or higher.
- Sore throat and difficulty swallowing.
- White or yellow spots or coating on the throat and tonsils.
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck.

Other symptoms, especially in children, may include general body aches, headache, stomachache, nausea, vomiting, or listlessness. Scarlet fever usually doesn't occur with cold symptoms, such as sneezing, runny or stuffy nose, or cough.

Red spots begin to appear on the roof of the mouth (palate) about 2 to 3 days after symptoms first appear. Bright red spots may appear on the tongue, giving it an appearance called "strawberry tongue."

The most noticeable symptom of scarlet fever is a rough, red rash that feels like fine sandpaper. The rash begins on the chest and abdomen and then spreads over the rest of the body within 24 hours. The rash and redness are more apparent in skin folds, especially in the groin, armpits, and elbow creases. It usually fades in about a week, and at that time the skin may begin to peel.

How is scarlet fever diagnosed?

Diagnosis of scarlet fever is usually based on a medical history, an examination of the throat, and a rapid strep test or throat culture to test for strep bacteria. One or both of these tests are needed to confirm

infection with strep bacteria.

How is scarlet fever treated?

Scarlet fever and the strep infection that causes it are treated with antibiotics.

What are the complications of scarlet fever?

Complications of scarlet fever include [infection of the middle ear](#), [sinusitis](#), and [pneumonia](#). In rare cases, a more serious infection may develop, such as [rheumatic fever](#) or [rheumatic heart disease](#). Most cases of scarlet fever can be cured without any permanent complications.

Who is affected by scarlet fever?

Scarlet fever is most common in children ages 2 to 10, but it can affect people of any age.

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