

## **Scarlet fever**

**Scarlet fever is a bacterial illness that causes a distinctive pink-red rash. It is rare in the UK nowadays and is usually mild.**

The characteristic symptom of scarlet fever is a widespread, fine pink-red rash that feels like sandpaper to touch. It may start in one area, but soon spreads to many parts of the body, such as the ears, neck and chest. The rash may be itchy.

Someone with scarlet fever will develop a flushed, red face – hence the name scarlet fever – although the skin around the mouth stays white. The tongue may look a bit like a strawberry.

Other symptoms include swollen neck glands, especially if you generally feel unwell.

Symptoms usually develop one to four days after a person is infected.

Scarlet fever usually follows a sore throat or a skin infection (called impetigo) that is caused by particular strains of streptococcus bacteria.

### **How it spreads**

Scarlet fever is very contagious. It can be caught by breathing in bacteria in airborne droplets from an infected person's coughs and sneezes.

### **Who is affected?**

Anybody can catch scarlet fever, but it usually affects children aged four to eight years old. Because it's so contagious, scarlet fever is likely to affect someone who is in close contact with a person with a sore throat or skin infection caused by streptococcus bacteria.

### **Outlook**

Although scarlet fever used to be a very serious disease, most cases today are mild.

Scarlet fever is easily treatable with antibiotics, which must be taken for 10 days. Most people recover after four to five days.

There is no evidence that catching scarlet fever when pregnant will put your baby at risk. However, pregnant women should tell healthcare staff if they are in contact with streptococcal infections, such as scarlet fever, around the time of the birth.

