

To: Headteachers of All Schools

LA Circ: A078/17

Dear colleagues,

RE recent increase in cases of Scarlet fever and Chicken Pox in schools reported to PHE South West Centre

At present, PHE are receiving an increased number of calls from schools reporting cases of Scarlet Fever and Chicken Pox. This letter outlines simple advice about protecting children from these infections.

Chickenpox

Chickenpox is 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. They then crust over to form scabs, which eventually drop off. To prevent spreading the infection, keep children off nursery or school until all the spots have crusted over.

For most children, chickenpox is a mild illness that gets better on its own. But some children can become more seriously ill and need to see a doctor.

Scarlet fever

Scarlet fever is also a mild childhood illness but unlike chickenpox, it requires antibiotic treatment. Symptoms include a sore throat, headache, fever, nausea and vomiting, followed by a fine red rash which typically first appears on the chest and stomach, rapidly spreading to other parts of the body. On more darkly-pigmented skin, the scarlet rash may be harder to spot, but it should feel like 'sandpaper'. The face can be flushed red but pale around the mouth. As the rash fades the skin on the fingertips, toes and groin area can peel.

If you think a child has scarlet fever:

- they need to see their GP or contact NHS 111 as soon as possible
- Make sure that the child takes the full course of any antibiotics prescribed by the doctor.
- Stay at home, away from nursery, school or work for **at least 24 hours after starting the antibiotic treatment**, to avoid spreading the infection

Complications

Children who have had chickenpox recently are more likely to develop more serious infection during an outbreak of scarlet fever and vigilance is required for symptoms such as a persistent high fever, cellulitis (skin infection) and arthritis. If you are concerned for any reason please seek medical assistance immediately.

Additional Information

If you have absence levels over and above what you would normally expect and linked to a circulating infection in the school, please report this to PHE's Health Protection Team on 0300 3038162 and further advice will be provided. Additional information can be found on the PHE

website <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england> and searching 'infection control schools.'

You can find more information on chickenpox and scarlet fever on NHS choices:

I hope this information is helpful to you. We appreciate the efforts you make to keep infections out of school.

Yours sincerely,

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