**in schools: what the guidance says**

UKHSA guidance warns that Strep A infections

**[M](https://schoolsweek.co.uk/author/amy-walker/)**

Schools have been advised to follow government guidance on scarlet fever outbreaks following the deaths of seven UK children from strep A infections.

On Monday, Colfe’s School in Lewisham, south London, confirmed that a 12-year-old pupil had died from a severe infection, known as invasive Group A strep (iGAS).

Since September, six other children under the age of 10 have died from complications after contracting the infection.

The [Department for Education](https://schoolsweek.co.uk/dfe-plans-to-check-pupil-capacity-in-secondary-schools/) is yet to issue its own advice to schools, but is directing them to [guidance](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1110540/Guidelines_for_the_public_health_management_of_scarlet_fever_outbreaks.pdf) from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

Group A streptococcus (GAS) is a common bacteria that can cause infections such as scarlet fever and impetigo. The most serious infections linked to GAS come from iGAS.

Cases of scarlet fever are currently above what is normally seen at this time of the year.

Latest UKHSA data shows that in the week commencing November 14, there were 851 cases reported, compared to an average of 186 in the same timeframe in preceding years.

While iGAS is still uncommon, there has also been an increase in children developing this infection this year. So far this season, which began in mid-September, there have been six deaths recorded within seven days of a diagnoses in children under 10.

This compares with four deaths in the same period in 2017-2018, the last high season for GAS infection.

**Two or more scarlet fever cases within 10 days constitutes an outbreak**

According to the UKHSA guidance, an outbreak of scarlet fever is defined as a credible report of two or more probable or confirmed cases attending the same school, notified within 10 days of each other.

There should also be an epidemiological link between cases, for example, they are in the same class or year group.

Reports have emerged of outbreaks at several schools, including at Ashford Church of England Primary School in Surrey. A six-year-old pupil at the school is among those who have died from the infection.

At St Vincent’s Voluntary Catholic Academy, in Hull, parents were asked to collect their children at lunchtime on Friday while the premises [underwent a ‘deep clean’](https://www.hulldailymail.co.uk/news/hull-east-yorkshire-news/hull-academy-closes-deep-clean-7892897) due to a small number of suspected scarlet fever cases.

Where they suspect an outbreak, schools are advised to notify their local Health Protection Team (HPT). The HPT will then conduct an investigation to establish whether there is an outbreak.

**Hand washing is key to preventing spread**

In its outbreak control guidance, UKHSA notes that infections can be spread through close contact between children and staff, as well as surfaces such as table tops, taps and handles.

Staff and parents at the school should be reminded that children and adults with scarlet fever should not return to school until at least 24 hours after starting treatment with an appropriate antibiotic.Children and staff with scarlet fever should not return until they have been taking antibiotics for at least 24 hours

Good hand hygiene should also “be enforced” for all pupils and staff, including through a programme that encourages children to wash their hands “at the start of the school day, after using the toilet, after play, before and after eating, and at the end of the school day.

The guidance also notes that scrapes, bites and wounds provide “a portal of entry for the organism” so these should be thoroughly cleaned and covered.

**Deep cleans could be required for serious outbreaks**

An Outbreak Control Team (OCT) could be sent in by UKHSA in some cases. This includes if there is a scarlet fever outbreak while chickenpox and [flu](https://schoolsweek.co.uk/schools-to-receive-a-co2-monitor-for-every-classroom-as-flu-cases-rise/) are circulating at the school, the outbreak does not appear to subside within three weeks, hospitalisations are reported or an iGAS infection is reported.

Additional control measures that might be considered in these cases include deep cleaning. The guidance says toys and equipment should be cleaned daily during the outbreak, with a “a very thorough terminal” after the outbreak is over.

Taps, toilet flush handles and door handles should be cleaned regularly throughout the day. The UKHSA recommends Hypochlorite at 1000 ppm for cleaning equipment and hard surfaces.

Carpets and soft furnishings should be vaccumed daily. Once the outbreak is over, carpets should be cleaned with a washer-extractor and soft furnishings, curtains and linen washed at the “hottest compatible temperature”.

In “exceptional” circumstances, such as reports of hospitalisations, the OCT may consider antibiotic chemoprophylaxis. This means prescribing antibiotics to those who do not have a reported case in order to prevent infection developing.

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