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To: Parents and carers in Southwark

Dear Parent/Carer,

You may be aware from the media that the UK is seeing a high number of Group A Streptococcus cases this year.

What is Group A Streptococcus (GAS)?

GAS is a bacteria that usually cause a mild infection which can lead to sore (strep) throats, impetigo or scarlet fever. It can be easily treated with antibiotics.

Scarlet fever is usually a mild illness, but it is very infectious. Symptoms to look out for include a sore throat, headache, and fever, along with a fine, pinkish or red body rash with a sandpapery feel. On darker skin, the rash can be more difficult to detect visually but will have a sandpapery feel.

In very rare circumstances, these bacteria can get into the bloodstream and cause serious illness – called invasive Group A strep (iGAS). Whilst iGAS infections are still uncommon, there has been an increase in cases this year, particularly in children under 10 and sadly, a small number of deaths.

What should I do if my child is ill?

Contact NHS 111 or your GP if you suspect your child has scarlet fever, because early treatment of scarlet fever with antibiotics is important to reduce the risk of complications. If your child has scarlet fever, keep them at home until at least 24 hours after the start of antibiotic treatment to avoid spreading the infection to others.

As a parent, if you feel that your child seems seriously unwell, you should trust your own judgement.

Contact NHS 111 or your GP if:

- your child is getting worse
- your child is feeding or eating much less than normal
- your child has had a dry nappy for 12 hours or more or shows other signs of dehydration
- your baby is under 3 months and has a temperature of 38°C, or is older than 3 months and has a temperature of 39°C or higher
- your baby feels hotter than usual when you touch their back or chest, or feels sweaty
- your child is very tired or irritable

Call 999 or go to A&E if:

- your child is having difficulty breathing – you may notice grunting noises or their tummy sucking under their ribs
- there are pauses when your child breathes
- your child's skin, tongue or lips are blue
- your child is floppy and will not wake up or stay awake

Good hand and respiratory hygiene are important for stopping the spread of many bugs. By teaching your child how to wash their hands properly with soap for 20 seconds, using a tissue to catch coughs and sneezes, and keeping away from others when feeling unwell, they will be able to reduce the risk of picking up or spreading infections.

Here are some links to further information:

UKHSA update on scarlet fever and invasive Group A strep

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ukhsa-update-on-scarlet-fever-and-invasive-group-a-strep>

UKHSA Blog post – Group A Strep – what you need to know

<https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2022/12/05/group-a-strep-what-you-need-to-know/>

5 ways to protect your under 5s this winter

<https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2022/10/25/5-ways-to-protect-your-under-5s-this-winter/>

Yours faithfully,



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