



# Group A Streptococcal infection

LCC IPC Guidance

Next Review October 2024

[infectionprevention@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:infectionprevention@lancashire.gov.uk)



## **What is Group A Streptococcal infection (GAS)?**

Group A Streptococci (GAS) are bacteria (germs) which are often found in the nose, throat or on the skin without causing harm or infection (colonisation). Sometimes these bacteria can get into parts of the body where they are not usually found and can cause infection.

## **How is GAS infection spread?**

GAS is spread mainly from droplets in the respiratory tract (nose and throat) through coughing, sneezing or kissing. The bacteria can also be spread by hands that have not been washed which then go onto contaminate wounds by direct contact.

## **What kind of illnesses are caused by GAS?**

GAS causes a diverse range of skin, soft tissue and respiratory tract infections, including:

- tonsillitis
- pharyngitis
- scarlet fever
- impetigo
- erysipelas
- cellulitis
- pneumonia

Scarlet fever is characterised by a rash, which usually accompanies a sore throat. Cases may also have a red and swollen tongue and flushed cheeks.

A small number of people may get a more serious form of the infection if the bacteria gets into parts of the body where it is not normally found, such as the blood, muscles or lungs. This is called invasive Group A Streptococcal disease (iGAS).

Two of the more severe diseases iGAS can cause are Streptococcal Toxic Shock Syndrome and necrotising fasciitis. These diseases are rare but are life threatening.

*Both iGAS and scarlet fever are notifiable diseases: health professionals must inform local health protection teams (HPTs) of suspected cases.*

## **Who is most at risk of getting GAS?**

The elderly and the very young are most at risk.

## **How can care settings stop the infection spreading to other service users and members of staff?**



Good hand hygiene (using soap and water or an alcohol based hand rub) should be carried out between each service user. The correct use of gloves and aprons should always be followed, regardless of whether the resident has a known infection or not. Staff and visitors must be extra vigilant in cases of GAS infection. Visitors must also be made aware of the importance of hand hygiene when entering and leaving the room as well as when they leave the setting.

A service user with GAS may need to stay in their room and be barrier nursed for a minimum of 24 hours following commencement of antibiotics to stop the infection spreading.

Contact your Infection Prevention Team or UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) Health Protection Team for advice regarding isolation of service users (details below).

### **Do close contacts need antibiotics as well?**

Most contacts of GAS do not get an infection and should only receive antibiotics if they have symptoms of a GAS infection:

- Sore throat
- High fever
- Severe aching or tender muscles
- Redness around wounds

Care settings must be vigilant for symptoms of GAS and iGAS in service users for the next 30 days and report any symptoms to the GP and say they have been in contact with someone with a GAS infection.

### **For more information contact:**

Lancashire County Council Infection Prevention Team  
[infectionprevention@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:infectionprevention@lancashire.gov.uk)

UKHSA Cumbria and Lancashire Health Protection Team

**Phone:** 0344 225 0562 option 2

**Out of office:** 0151 434 4819

### **Acknowledgements:**

Questions & Answers for close community contacts of cases of GAS/iGAS HPA  
2008



Group A Streptococcal infection information for patients Health Protection Scotland  
NHS Scotland

UKHSA 2023 [Group A Streptococcus - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

