Scarlet fever: A guide for parents

Dear Parent,

There has been one incidence of scarlet fever at Oberoi International School. While the child’s parents have consulted a doctor and taken other precautions, we would like to share some guidelines and precautionary steps for you to consider for your child as well.

Please go through this letter and call us, or write to us, in case there are any further questions or if you require further information. You can call 6130-3535 and ask to speak to me or any of the other physicians, or reach Shivani Dawlatjada at shivani.dawlatjada@healthspring.in.

What is scarlet fever?

Scarlet fever is an infectious disease caused by Group A Streptococcus pyogenes bacteria which presents as sore throat, fever and a characteristic red rash. It is commonly seen in children aged 4 to 8 years.

How do you know if your child is infected?

The child will show symptoms such as fever, sore throat, bright red tongue with strawberry appearance, or small fleeting red spots on his/her palate. The child usually has a rash which is fine, red, blanches on pressure, and appears 1 to 2 days after the fever. The rash mostly begins on the neck and face first, spreading to the chest and finally to the rest of the body. On the face, it appears as red cheeks with a pale area around the mouth. It also appears in skin folds. The rash begins to fade after 3 to 4 days and there may be some peeling of skin flakes. If you have any doubts, please visit your family physician or stop by the Healthspring Goregaon centre to speak with a Healthspring physician.

How do children typically contract scarlet fever?

Scarlet fever is usually spread by the aerosol route (inhalation) but may also be spread by skin contact or by fomites.

What should you do if your child contracts a scarlet fever?

- Treatment involves a course of antibiotics usually oral penicillin or a macrolide antibiotic (such as erythromycin) if the child is sensitive to penicillin. Medications should be given only after confirmation of diagnosis and under a doctor’s guidance.
- Avoid contact with the infected child.
- Ensure that the child stays hydrated, has nutritious meals and gets proper rest.
• Watch for development of early complications such as skin infection, pneumonia, and sepsis, and late complications such as rheumatic fever and kidney disease.
• The infection itself is usually cured with a 10-day course of antibiotics, but it may take a few weeks for the tonsils and swollen glands to return to normal.

What are the investigations required in case scarlet fever is suspected?

• Diagnosis is clinical depending on the symptoms
• Complete blood count
• ESR, C-reactive protein and anti-streptolysin O titre
• Throat swab
• Blood culture is rarely positive

When is your child ready to go back to school?

When scarlet fever occurs because of a throat infection, the fever typically subsides within 3 to 5 days, and the sore throat passes soon afterward. The rash usually fades on the sixth day after sore throat symptoms started, and begins to peel (as described above). The infection itself is usually cured with a 10-day course of antibiotics, but it may take a few weeks for tonsils and swollen glands to return to normal.

How can you protect your child from contracting scarlet fever?

The best way to keep from getting infected is to encourage your child to wash his/her hands often and avoid sharing eating utensils, linens, towels or other personal items. It is especially important for anyone with a sore throat to wash his/her hands often. There is no vaccine to prevent scarlet fever. Children with scarlet fever should stay home from school for at least 24 hours after starting antibiotics.

We hope this answers your questions; please be assured that Oberoi International School and Healthspring are vigilant, and will help keep your child healthy. Please do feel free to reach out to us if you have any more questions.

Dr. Khullar
Paediatrician, Healthspring