



Central Michigan District Health Department  
*“Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities”*

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[www.cmdhd.org](http://www.cmdhd.org)

## Scarlet Fever

### What is Scarlet Fever?

Scarlet Fever is a form of streptococcal disease characterized by a skin rash appearing most often on the neck, chest, underarm folds, elbow and groin, and on the inner surfaces of the thighs. Group A streptococci bacteria cause a variety of diseases. The more frequently known conditions are streptococcal sore throat (strep throat), a skin infection called impetigo, ear infections (otitis media), cellulites, pneumonia, and scarlet fever. In outbreaks, common in the springtime, one form of these diseases are often dominant. There is no vaccine to prevent strep infections such as scarlet fever.

### What are the symptoms?

Illness begins with a fever, sore throat, vomiting and extreme tiredness. The rash appears within the first 24 hours as a pink-red blush containing lesions the size of pinheads (looks like a sunburn with goose pimples). The rash rapidly spreads to all parts of the body including the hands and feet. It clears by the end of the first week and is followed by a “peeling” of the skin on the tips of the fingers and toes. At first, the tongue is coated white. It sheds the white coating by the fourth or fifth day leaving a bright red “strawberry tongue”.

### How does it spread and how can I prevent spreading it?

Scarlet Fever is spread by sneezing and coughing. If it is in the form of an infection of the skin, it can be passed through coming into contact with the person’s infected skin. You can reduce the chance of spreading the disease by proper handwashing, using separate utensils and glasses and washing thoroughly with soap and water.

### How long does it last?

With adequate antibiotics, the ability a child has to spread the strep germ is over within 24 hours, even though he/she may be taking the antibiotic for ten days or longer. Once you have had scarlet fever, you usually have permanent immunity or protection and second attacks are rare.