# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Increase in cases of Strep A bacterial infection** |
| **DATE**  | **06 December 2022.** |
| **BY** | **Eluned Morgan, Minister for Health and Social Services** |

The recent deaths of children across the UK; including a child here in Wales, has caused a great deal of concern. Our thoughts and condolences go out to the families, friends and all those impacted by these tragic deaths.

Strep A is a bacteria that many people carry without any symptoms. It can be spread to others through close contact and through coughs and sneezes. Where people do develop symptoms, they are typically quite mild, such as the common childhood disease known as scarlet fever.

Very rarely and particularly if an individual has other health issues or is co-infected with another infection at the same time, such as chickenpox or a respiratory virus, the Strep A bacteria can get into the bloodstream. This is then known as invasive Strep A disease and can sadly result in a tragic outcome, especially if not treated quickly.

We are seeing a higher number of cases of Strep A infection this year compared to recent years and we are also seeing it during the winter, when ordinarily we would expect to see large numbers of cases during the spring. Investigations are ongoing but we believe this is likely to have occurred because of the lack of social mixing over the past couple of years.

The high number of cases of this common bacterial infection circulating at the same time as a range of winter respiratory infections has, we believe, resulted in increased numbers of the rarer and more serious invasive Strep A disease.

Early signs of the more serious invasive Strep A disease include a high fever, severe muscle aches, local muscle tenderness, or redness at the site of a wound. Parents are advised to contact their GP or get medical advice straight away if they think their child has any of the signs and symptoms of invasive Strep A disease.

All the relatively mild illnesses caused by the Strep A bacteria can be treated with common antibiotics. The increase in demand for antibiotics to treat suspected cases of Strep A has led to some pharmacies in Wales experiencing shortages of stock. We are working with the UK Government medicines supply team and other partners to make sure pharmacies in Wales have the supplies they need. We are confident suppliers are working to address any supply issues, should people have difficulty in obtaining their prescription they may need to visit a different pharmacy or in some cases ask their GP to prescribe an alternative treatment.Scarlet fever is probably the most common of these illnesses and the characteristic symptom is a fine red rash, which typically first appears on the chest and stomach, rapidly spreading to other parts of the body. Parents who suspect their child has symptoms of scarlet fever are advised that they should:

* Contact their GP, visit [111.wales.nhs.uk,](https://111.wales.nhs.uk/) or call NHS 111 Wales
* Make sure their child takes the full course of any antibiotics prescribed by the doctor
* Keep their child at home, away from nursery, school or work and follow any guidance provided by their GP on how long they should remain absent from these settings.
* Find up-to-date information and advice on streptococcal A infections at [111.wales.nhs.uk](https://111.wales.nhs.uk/)

Further information on the symptoms that parents should look out for and who they should contact for further advice is available on the Public Health Wales website: [iGAS infection remains rare, say public health experts - Public Health Wales (nhs.wales)](https://phw.nhs.wales/news/igas-infection-remains-rare-say-public-health-experts/)

Public Health Wales are leading the response in Wales and an all-Wales Incident Management Team has been established to co-ordinate all appropriate action. Public Health Wales are also working closely with the public health agencies across the UK.

I will keep members updated.