

Rheumatic fever

Description

Rheumatic fever is a serious illness. It often starts with a sore throat. Without treatment, some sore throats can cause rheumatic fever which may lead to rheumatic heart disease.

- Rheumatic fever requires **GP/Hospital diagnosis** and treatment to minimise risk of rheumatic heart disease
- It is very important the child does not get rheumatic fever again
- The best way to stop the child having another attack of rheumatic fever is to make sure they have regular penicillin injections – on time
- A child can get rheumatic fever more than once, therefore getting **sore throats checked and treated every time** is very important

How does it spread

Rheumatic fever is not contagious. However, the sore throat that may have preceded the rheumatic fever may be contagious. Please see the strep throat fact sheet for more information.

Symptoms

Sore throat one to five weeks prior to onset of symptoms listed below:

- Pain and swelling in hips, ankles, elbows and wrists
- Rash
- Fever
- Jerky movements
- Shortness of breath
- Tiredness.

Most strep throats get better and don't lead to rheumatic fever. However, in a small number of people an untreated strep throat leads to rheumatic fever one to five weeks after a sore throat.

Responsibilities of Early Childhood Education Service

If a child is complaining of a sore throat, or showing any of the other symptoms in the weeks following a sore throat, advise parents and recommend they take the child to their family doctor for an assessment. Offer information in references/links below.

Responsibilities of parents

Please take your child to the GP/hospital if you suspect your child may have rheumatic fever. If a diagnosis of rheumatic fever is made, your child will likely be hospitalized for initial treatment to minimise the risk of developing rheumatic heart disease. Ongoing monthly treatment of penicillin will be required.

Links/references

- <https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/rheumatic-fever>
- <https://www.heartfoundation.org.nz/your-heart/heart-conditions/rheumatic-heart-disease>
- <https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/rheumatic-fever>
- <https://www.healthnavigator.org.nz/health-a-z/r/rheumatic-fever-children/>