

Sample letter for parents/school newsletter

Dear Parents/Whanau/Caregivers

A common cause of sore throats is a bacteria called group A streptococcus (strep), which should be treated with antibiotics. In New Zealand, a small number of children with this bacteria, if not treated with antibiotics, can go on to develop a serious disease called **Rheumatic Fever**. Māori and Pacific children aged 5-14 years are most at risk from this disease.

What is Rheumatic Fever?

Rheumatic Fever starts with a bacterial strep infection causing a sore throat. The sore throat may disappear, but a few weeks later the following symptoms may develop:

- sore or swollen joints
- a rash
- shortness of breath
- jerky movements
- fever

Rheumatic Fever can cause permanent heart damage, which may mean stays in hospital, surgery, and sometimes a shorter life. Someone with Rheumatic Fever needs ten years of antibiotic injections to protect their heart.

Fortunately, if a strep sore throat is treated correctly with antibiotics your child should not get Rheumatic Fever.

What do I need to do if my child has a sore throat?

If a child gets a sore throat, please make sure they are checked at a local swabbing service. If they have a group A strep bacterial infection they will need antibiotics to treat the infection. It is important that all of the ten days of antibiotics are taken exactly as prescribed so the strep bacteria are killed and Rheumatic Fever is prevented.

By taking all sore throats seriously, we can help prevent life-long illness and suffering for our children.

New FREE sore throat swabbing services

Waikato District Health Board is working with communities to provide free sore throat management services across the Waikato, to prevent Rheumatic Fever and heart damage. Drop in services are provided at GP practices, accident and medical centres, secondary school based health clinics in low decile schools, and selected pharmacies and pathlabs, for eligible children and young people aged 4 – 19 years. Please follow this link for a list of local swabbing services:

<https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/conditions-and-treatments/diseases-and-illnesses/sore-throat/sore-throat-clinics/sore-throat-clinics-waikato>

For more information on Rheumatic Fever and who this new service is for, check out our website:

<http://www.waikatodhb.health.nz/public-health-advice/a-z-of-public-health-topics/p-r/rheumatic-fever/>

Sore throats matter – get them checked!!

Information provided by Population Health,
Waikato District Health Board, 15/7/15

