Most children with fever and a sore throat have a viral infection. Viral infections are very common in the winter months. Antibiotics do not treat viruses, and viral infections will get better on their own. Children with viral infections can be helped to feel better with rest, making sure they drink enough fluids, and paracetamol or ibuprofen to help with pain or fever.

This winter, we have seen more children than usual for this time of year with fever or sore throat due to infections caused by the bacteria Group A streptococcus. Group A Streptococcus (GAS) is a very common bacteria - around 1 in 10 children carry the GAS bacteria in their throats when they are well without it causing any harm. When GAS does cause illness, it usually causes tonsillitis (sometimes called "strep throat"), or scarlet fever Mild GAS infections often get better on their own, but sometimes if children are more unwell antibiotics can make them feel better faster. Most children with mild GAS, including scarlet fever, can be looked after at home.

Very rarely, GAS can cause more serious infections like pneumonia or sepsis. Children with severe GAS need antibiotics and admission to hospital for supportive care. We have seen more children with severe GAS this winter than expected for this time of year, but it is still very rare. All of the children in Scotland with severe GAS so far this year have got better with treatment in hospital.

It can be difficult for a healthcare professional to tell for sure that an infection is caused by a virus or bacteria like GAS, but certain symptoms and signs when you or your child is examined help to identify which children should be given antibiotics. For example, if you or your child has a sore throat or rash but no high fever, they are very unlikely to need antibiotics. Your healthcare professional may also consider whether your child has any risk factors which might make them more likely to develop more severe GAS. For example, the very elderly or those with chicken pox are more at risk.

All antibiotics have side effects and giving them to people who are well and very unlikely to develop severe illness can do more harm than good. We ask people who have been in contact with GAS but have no symptoms not to use services like 111, GP and ED which are needed for unwell children to seek advice or antibiotics.

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GG+C