



Information about rheumatic fever



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Before you start



This is a long document.



It can be hard for some people to read a document this long.



Some things you can do to make it easier are:

- read it a few pages at a time
- set aside some quiet time to look at it
- have someone read it with you to support you to understand it.





Some of the information in this document may make people:

- upset
- worried.



This information is not meant to scare anyone.



This information does not mean the things in this document will happen to:

- you
- people you know.

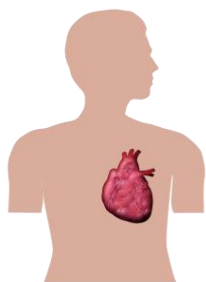


If you are worried you can talk to your:

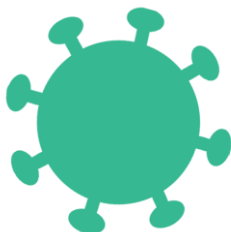
- whānau / family
- friends
- doctor.

What you will find in here

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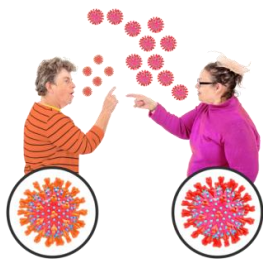
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About this Easy Read

Health New Zealand
Te Whatu Ora

This Easy Read is from **Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora**.



Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora is the part of the Government in charge of health services like hospitals.



This Easy Read is about **rheumatic fever**.



Rheumatic fever is a bad illness that can damage your heart.

Rheumatic fever can happen after someone has an illness called strep throat.



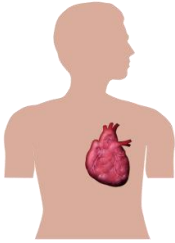
If you think you have rheumatic fever you need to talk to a **healthcare provider** right away.



A **healthcare provider** is someone who supports people to look after their health like a:

- doctor
- nurse.

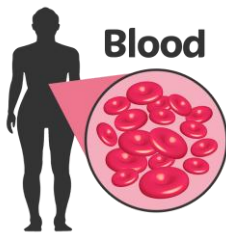
About rheumatic fever



Rheumatic fever can **permanently** damage your **heart valves**.



Permanently means the damage lasts for the rest of your life.



Your **heart valves** control how blood moves through your heart.



Permanent damage to the heart valves is called rheumatic heart disease.



You need to get **antibiotic** injections if you have:

- rheumatic fever
- rheumatic heart disease.

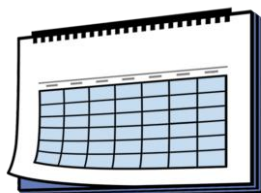


An **antibiotic** is a type of medicine.



Antibiotic injections stop the:

- person getting rheumatic fever again
- heart being damaged more.



People need to get these injections:

- every 28 days
- for at least 10 years.



Sometimes people with rheumatic fever need to have heart **surgery**.



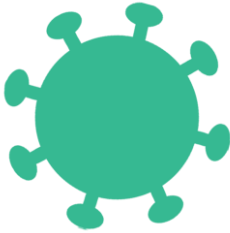
Surgery is when doctors cut you open to fix a problem inside your body.



Rheumatic fever can also make your:

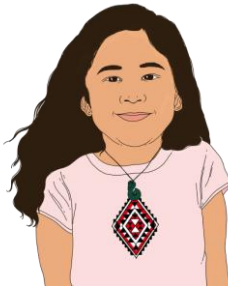
- hands move in unusual ways
- arms move in unusual ways.

What causes rheumatic fever?



Rheumatic fever is caused by a germ called Group A *Streptococcus*.

This germ is called **strep** for short.

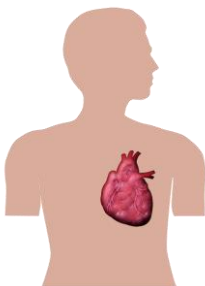


The strep germ can live in your throat without making you sick.



Sometimes the strep germ makes people have a sore throat.

This is called strep throat.



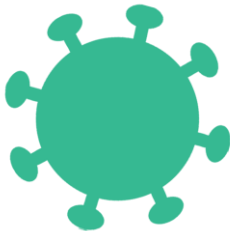
Sometimes people with strep throat get rheumatic fever.



Talking to your healthcare provider whenever you have a sore throat can stop the strep germ from spreading.



Sometimes people get skin **infections** from the strep germ.



An **infection** happens when germs get inside your body.



Some scientists think that the strep skin infection might also cause rheumatic fever.



We do not know for sure if the strep skin infection causes rheumatic fever.

Who gets rheumatic fever?



You are more likely to get rheumatic fever when you are 3 to 35 years old.

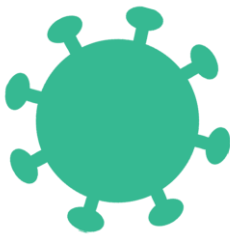


You are more likely to get rheumatic fever if you live with someone who has rheumatic fever.

Symptoms of rheumatic fever



Symptoms are signs that you might have an illness.



Strep throat can lead to rheumatic fever.



A sore throat is the main symptom of strep throat.

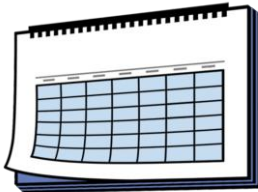
If your child has a sore throat they might find it hard to:



- swallow
- eat
- drink.



Most people who get strep throat will not go on to get rheumatic fever.

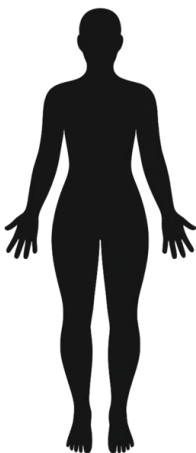


Symptoms of rheumatic fever normally happen 1 to 5 weeks after the person has a sore throat.



Sore joints

Sore **joints** are the most common symptom of rheumatic fever.



Joints are the parts of your body where bones join together like your:

- knees
- ankles
- elbows.



Joints might:

- be red
- be swollen
- feel hot.



Different joints might be sore on different days.



Some of the joints that might be sore are the:

- hips
- knees
- elbows
- ankles
- wrists.



Having sore joints can make it hard to walk.



Shortness of breath

Shortness of breath means finding it hard to breathe.



People with rheumatic fever might notice that they feel more short of breath during exercise than usual.

Rash



A **rash** is a red patch on your skin.



Lumps

People with rheumatic fever might have small lumps under the skin over their:

- elbows
- wrists
- knees
- ankles
- spine / backbone.

These lumps do not hurt.



Unusual movements

People with rheumatic fever might have unusual jerky movements.



These movements might happen to the:

- hands
- feet
- tongue
- face.



The movements can make it look like the person cannot sit still.



The movements can make handwriting hard.



The movements go away when the person is asleep.



Tamariki / children and
rangatahi / young people can have
other symptoms of rheumatic fever
like:



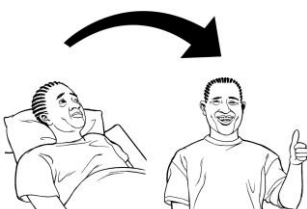
- a sore tummy

- weight loss

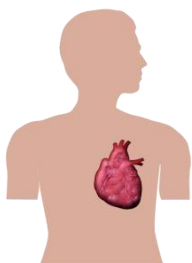
- being very tired



- a fever over 38 degrees that lasts
for a few days.



Most symptoms of rheumatic fever
will go away after a while.



Even if the symptoms go away the
heart can still be permanently
damaged.

Getting health advice



You should talk to a healthcare provider straight away if anyone in your house:

- is aged 3 to 35 years old

and

- has a sore throat.



You can talk to your usual healthcare provider for advice.



Your usual healthcare provider might be a:

- GP
- hauora provider.



You can also phone Healthline for advice.



The **More information** section on pages 30 to 35 of this Easy Read tells you how to call Healthline.



People can get rheumatic fever more than once.



This means you need to talk to your healthcare provider every time someone in your house gets a sore throat.



Your doctor might do a test to see if you have the germ that causes rheumatic fever.



Your doctor might give antibiotics to:

- you
- people in your house.

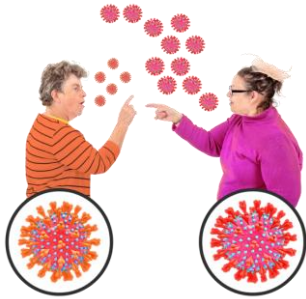


Taking the antibiotics can stop people from getting rheumatic fever.



If you have a skin infection your doctor can also give you antibiotics to make it better.

Stopping strep from spreading

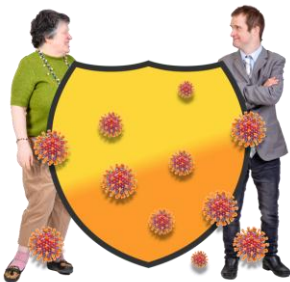


It is easy for the strep germ to spread in your home.



Strep spreads most easily in homes where lots of people:

- live in the same rooms
- sleep in the same rooms.



There are lots of things you can do to lower the chance of spreading strep.

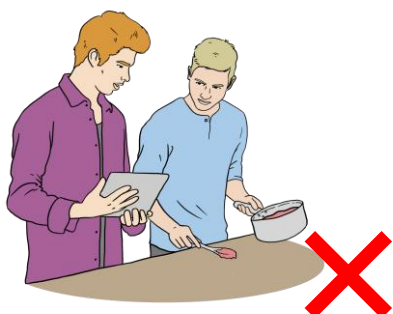


Do not share:

- drink bottles
- cutlery
- food.



Do not chew food before giving it to a baby.



Try not to make food for other people if you:

- are sick
- have a skin infection.



When you cough / sneeze:

- cover your:
 - mouth
 - nose
- throw away the tissue
- wash your hands with:
 - soap
 - water
- dry your hands.



Try not to have lots of people:

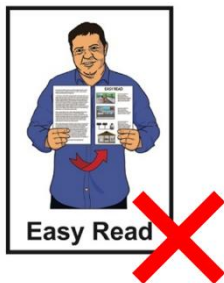
- sleeping in the same room
- sharing beds.

More information



You can find more information about rheumatic fever on this **website**:

www.healthnz.govt.nz/rheumatic-fever



This website is **not** in Easy Read.



For medical advice you can **phone** Healthline on:

0800 611 166



You can call Healthline at any time.



It does not cost money to call Healthline.

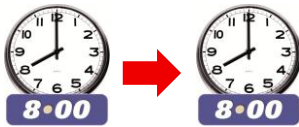


Healthline has interpreters available if needed.



You can choose to speak with a:

- Māori advisor
- Pacific advisor
- disability advisor.

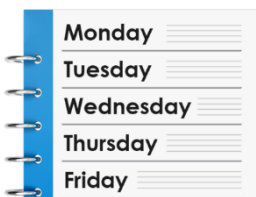


You can speak to one of these advisors if you call from 8 am to 8 pm.



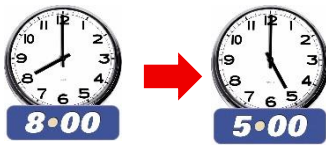
If it is not an emergency you can contact the Disability Helpline by:

- **phoning:** 0800 11 12 13
- **texting:** 8988.



The Disability Helpline is available:

- Monday to Friday
- 8 am to 5 pm.



There is more information about the Disability Helpline on their **website** at:

<https://healthpoint.co.nz/disability-helpline>



This information is **not** in Easy Read.



People living in **rural** areas can contact a doctor at Ka Ora Telecare:

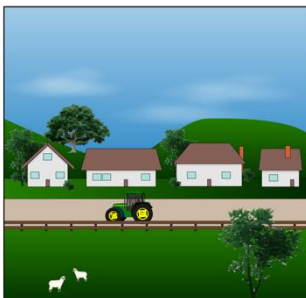
- by **phoning**:

0800 252 672



- on their **website**:

www.kaora.co.nz

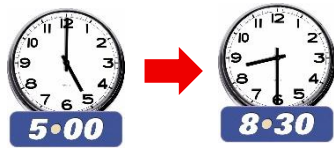


Here **rural** means not in a:

- city
- big town.



The Ka Ora website is **not** in Easy Read.



Ka Ora Telecare is available:

- after hours from 5 pm to 8.30 am on Monday to Friday
- 24 hours / all the time on:
 - weekends
 - public holidays.



If you find it hard to use the phone the **New Zealand Relay** service is for people who are:

- Deaf / hard of hearing
- deafblind
- speech impaired / find it hard to talk.



You can find out more about the New Zealand Relay service at:

www.nzrelay.co.nz

This information has been written by Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora.



It has been translated into Easy Read by the Make it Easy Kia Māmā Mai service of People First New Zealand Ngā Tāngata Tuatahi.



The ideas in this document are not the ideas of People First New Zealand Ngā Tāngata Tuatahi.



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