

Taking the Rheumatic Fever message ‘Get every sore throat checked’ into hard to reach rural communities – Sarah Bain, Health Promotion Agency

A strep throat can lead to rheumatic fever if it's left untreated. Rheumatic fever is very serious and can cause heart damage. You can't tell if it's a strep just by looking, so it's important to get every sore throat checked as soon as possible to prevent a strep throat turning into rheumatic fever. If antibiotics are prescribed, it's important that children take them for the full 10 days, even if they feel better, to stop it turning into rheumatic fever.

In New Zealand, Māori and Pacific children and young people aged 4 to 19 years in parts of the North Island – particularly those who live in crowded homes and who have a family history of rheumatic fever – are more likely to get strep sore throats and therefore, rheumatic fever.

The Health Promotion Agency has been working with the Ministry of Health to raise awareness of rheumatic fever and its link to sore throats. Their national Rheumatic Fever Awareness Campaign, using TV, radio and online advertising to promote the sore throat messages, ends on 31 July. From August, rheumatic fever ongoing awareness activities will be led by the 11 District Health Boards (DHBs) with a high incidence of rheumatic fever.

Unlike densely-populated urban areas, where those at risk of rheumatic fever (Māori and Pacific children and young people aged 4–19 years) may be concentrated within suburbs or ‘hot spot’ areas, promoting rheumatic fever messages in rural areas can be challenging. If populations are concentrated, targeted advertising can achieve real impact, through local channels, such as mobile billboards, bus backs, and in-community posters. Local channels can offer high exposure and placements in high risk neighbourhoods (eg, on buses following local routes). However, in rural areas, the at-risk population may be spread across the entire region with large distances between families. The impact of all promotional activity is likely to be spread thinly given these distances. So for those living in rural and remote regions, it's important to take every opportunity to keep the key message, ‘Get every sore throat checked’ top of mind by continuing to actively promote the messages through all your community channels. RHĀNZ members are welcome to promote the rheumatic fever key messages in your workplaces, websites, electronic newsletters or social media channels. Several resources are available to help with this:

[Educational video](#) on what rheumatic fever is and how you can prevent it

Dr Sarah Sciascia and Tofiga Fepulea'i present information in this educational video for parents and caregivers who want to know more about rheumatic fever. It works well in community settings and homes, or for people to view online.

[Key Tips for a Warmer, Drier Home – short videos](#)

NINE KEY TIPS COVER PRACTICAL, LOW-COST THINGS FAMILIES CAN DO IN THEIR HOMES TO KEEP THEM WARMER AND DRIER, AND STOP GERMS SPREADING. ONE TIP IS FEATURED PER VIDEO, WHICH MAKES IT IDEAL CONTENT FOR SOCIAL MEDIA.

How do these tips relate to rheumatic fever?

In a warm, dry home the family may have more space to spread out around the home, rather than having to crowd in the same room. Having more warm rooms and more sleeping spaces available means germs such as strep throat, which can lead to rheumatic fever, are less likely to spread.

Rheumatic Fever campaign background

The aim of the 2017 Rheumatic Fever Awareness Campaign is to increase awareness among Māori and Pacific parents and caregivers of high-risk children and young people about the importance of getting sore throats checked as quickly as possible. If a child or young person is given antibiotics, it's important they take them for the whole 10 days, even if they feel better, to stop the sore throat turning into rheumatic fever.

Areas of focus are DHB catchment areas in:

- Wider Auckland (Waitematā, Auckland, Counties-Manukau)
- Northland
- Waikato
- Bay of Plenty
- Tairāwhiti
- Hawke's Bay
- Lakes (Rotorua, Taupō, Tūrangi)
- Wider Wellington (Capital and Coast, and Hutt Valley)