How can I remember to get my needle every 3 to 4 weeks?

Here are a few ways to remember when you are due for your needles:

- Keep your needle chart in a place where you can see it – fridge, cupboard, toilet door.
- Go for your needle on the day when the moon is full or it starts again (new moon).
- Go for your needle at the start of every month.

What else will my child/family member need to know if they have rheumatic heart disease?

Keep in regular contact with your clinic. The clinic staff will work with your family to make sure your child/family member gets all the necessary care.

Regular checkups by the dentist are important. Tell the dentist your child/family member has rheumatic heart disease. The dentist will give extra antibiotic medication to stop mouth germs doing damage to the heart.

Also if your family member is having an operation or a baby, please let the health staff know they have rheumatic heart disease.

How can I stop myself or my family from getting sick with acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease?

- Get all sore throats and skin sores checked by health staff as soon as possible.
- Keep all cuts and sores clean.
- Have a bath/shower every day.
- Good dental hygiene – brush teeth every morning and evening.
- Good hand washing – before meals and after the toilet.
- Stay healthy – eat good food, be active.
- Go to the doctor and dentist regularly.

What is acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease?

Acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease still affects many Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander communities.

This booklet is for you and your community, to help answer questions about this sickness and how it affects the body, and what to do to prevent it.

Please speak with your local health worker, nurse or doctor if you would like more information on acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease.

Acknowledgments:

Strong Heart, Strong Body — Information about rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease, RHD Queensland
What is acute rheumatic fever?

Acute rheumatic fever is a sickness caused by a germ called Streptococcus, also known as strep.

The strep germ is a common cause of sore throats and skin sores.

In some children and adults ‘strep’ throat can cause sickness in other parts of the body: joints, skin, heart and brain.

This is known as acute rheumatic fever or ARF.

Who most commonly gets acute rheumatic fever?

Most commonly seen in school aged children aged 5–14 years, however, some adults can also get it.

Does acute rheumatic fever cause any long term damage?

Acute rheumatic fever does not cause any lasting damage to the joints, skin or brain.

However acute rheumatic fever can cause long term damage to the heart.

This is known as rheumatic heart disease or RHD.

How does acute rheumatic fever affect the heart?

Rheumatic fever can cause damage to the valves of the heart.

The valves are like doors; they allow blood to flow in the right direction.

Damage to the valves can make the heart weak.

Every time an individual has acute rheumatic fever it can cause more damage to the heart valves.

People who get rheumatic heart disease can end up very sick.

How will I know if my child or family member has acute rheumatic fever?

If your child has any of the following symptoms it could be acute rheumatic fever:

- sore or swollen joints (knees, ankles, elbows, wrists)
- a fever
- a skin rash (on the trunk, arms and legs)
- jerky movements and difficulty walking
- lumps under the skin (elbow, wrist, knees and ankles)

What do I do if my child or family member has any of these symptoms?

If your child/family member has a sore throat, painful joints or fever, go to the clinic for a check up as soon as possible.

Health staff may send your child/family member to the hospital for tests. This is the only way to know for sure if it is acute rheumatic fever.

The tests may include a throat swab, blood tests and an ultrasound of the heart, called an echocardiogram.

What happens when my child/family member comes home from hospital after having acute rheumatic fever?

The best way to stop another episode of acute rheumatic fever is 3–4 weekly penicillin needles.

The hospital/clinic staff will provide information about penicillin injections, and the best way to remember to have them every 3–4 weeks.

It is important that you do not miss any needles, because you can get acute rheumatic fever again, which will cause more damage to your heart.