

**What is scabies?**

Scabies is a fairly common disease of the skin caused by an infestation of a microscopic mite. Scabies mites burrow into the top layer of the skin, producing pimple-like irritations or linear burrows and intense itching. Occasionally, secondary bacterial infections may occur.

**Who gets scabies?**

Scabies infestations can affect people from all socioeconomic levels without regard to age, sex, race or standards of personal hygiene. Clusters of cases or outbreaks are occasionally seen in health care facilities, institutions and child care centers.

**How is scabies spread?**

Scabies mites are transferred by direct skin-to-skin contact. Indirect transfer through clothing or bedding can occur only if these items have been contaminated by infested people immediately before handling of these items. Scabies can also be transmitted during sexual contact. **Scabies from other animals cannot infest humans!**

**How is scabies diagnosed?**

Definitive diagnosis involves demonstrating the presence of the mite by taking skin scrapings, then microscopically examining the specimens obtained. The "ink prep" method may also be used to demonstrate the burrows.

**What are the symptoms of scabies?**

The most prominent symptom of scabies is intense itching, particularly at night. The areas most often affected by scabies include: the webs and sides of the fingers; around the wrists, elbows and armpits; waist; thighs; genitalia; nipples and breasts; and lower buttocks. In severe infestations, the skin becomes dry and scaly; this condition is often called "crusted scabies" due to the appearance of the skin.

**How soon do symptoms occur?**

After exposure, symptoms will usually appear in 2 to 6 weeks in people who have not previously been exposed to scabies infestations. People who have had previous infestation with scabies mites may show symptoms within 1 to 4 days after re-exposure.

**When and for how long can a person spread scabies?**

A person is able to spread scabies until mites and eggs are killed by treatment. Individuals with scabies should not attend school, child care or work until the day after treatment is initiated. The mites are present and can spread to another individual long before the infected person shows symptoms.

**What is the treatment for scabies?**

Skin lotions containing lindane, permethrin, pyrethrin or crotamiton are available, but require a prescription. The lotion is applied to the whole body except the head and neck and left on for 8 to 12 hours, after which it is thoroughly washed off. Clothing and bedding should be laundered in hot water or dry cleaned concurrently with treatment of the individual. Clothing and/or bedding may also be sealed in plastic bags for 7 to 10 days, during which time scabies mites and eggs will die. Treatment may need to be repeated in 7 to 10 days. Sometimes itching can persist for 1 to 2 weeks after treatment, but this should not be regarded as treatment failure or reinfestation. Avoid over treatment.

***It is not necessary to spray, fumigate or otherwise chemically treat the home,***

*school or child care center for scabies.*

**What can be done to prevent the spread of scabies?**

Avoid physical contact with infested individuals and their belongings, specifically clothing and bedding. Health education about the life cycle of scabies mites, the need for early diagnosis and proper treatment, including simultaneous treatment of infested individuals and their contacts, is extremely important.

Wear rubber, latex or plastic gloves when physically contacting infested people and their clothing and bedding. Wash exposed skin, especially hands and arms, immediately after physically contacting infested people and their clothing and bedding.