



Fact Sheet: Scabies

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.

What is Scabies?

It is an infestation of the skin caused by very tiny parasites called the human itch mite that burrows into the outer layer of skin to lay eggs. The mites are white or colorless and are about the size of a dot at the end of a sentence.

Mites living on a person can survive 2 to 3 days, and are capable of infesting another person. On a person, mites can live 1 to 2 months.

How is it spread?

Scabies affects people throughout the world from all social classes and races. Scabies is most commonly found in crowded groups of people, and is transmitted through prolonged personal contact with infested skin, clothing, towels or bedding.

Scabies can spread easily to sexual partners and household contacts. Infested persons are able to spread scabies until all mites and eggs are destroyed which usually takes 1 or 2 treatments, a week apart, depending on the medication used.

What are the symptoms of scabies?

Although the infestation can vary in location and severity, it commonly appears around the webs of the fingers or toes and around the waist and armpits.

Other areas to check for burrow marks are the inner portions of the elbows and wrists, and in the creases of the groin area.

Scabies typically does not affect the face or scalp, except on infants and young children.

Symptoms can include:

- Itching at the burrow site which may be worse at night.

- Tiny red dots on the skin following the burrow track (grey/silver lines).

Symptoms may not appear for 2 to 6 weeks after exposure. People who have had scabies before, may have symptoms appear 1 to 4 days after a new exposure.

How is scabies treated?

To confirm diagnosis and receive treatment for scabies, people should consult their health care provider for prescriptive scabicide lotion or cream. Positive identification of the mite can only be made by using a microscope.

Scabies can be cured in 24 to 48 hours with prescription medication. However, the itching may last for 2 to 3 weeks.

Norwegian or crusted scabies may be more difficult to treat and require multiple treatments with 1 or more agents to fully eliminate skin infestations.

- Apply the medication thoroughly on the skin throughout the body (all places except for the face): neck, arms, back, buttocks, between fingers and toes.
- Leave lotion on for the recommended amount of time, and take a bath to remove the medication (according to the package insert).
- All household members and sexual contacts should be treated at the same time.

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- Wash all clothing and bedding worn or used in the 72 hours prior to treatment in hot water and dry in a hot dryer.
- Items that cannot be washed should be placed in an airtight bag for at least 72 hours or be dry cleaned.
- Thoroughly vacuum all chairs and carpets in rooms where the infected individual spent time.
- Persons with scabies should be excluded from school or work until one day after treatment.

How is scabies prevented?

- Prevention of new cases is based on early detection, diagnosis and treatment of scabies.
- Wash hands frequently throughout the day.
- Fumigation of living areas is not needed and can be harmful.
- Scabies is not transmitted by animals such as pets.