

Scabies- Factsheet

What is scabies?

Scabies is a disease of the skin caused by a mite. Scabies mites burrow or dig into the skin producing pimple-like irritations or burrows. This is called an 'infestation'. These mites cannot live more than three days without skin contact.

What are the symptoms of scabies?

Severe itching, especially at night, is the most common symptom of scabies. A sign of infestation includes small raised red bumps, blisters or rashes. The areas of the skin most often affected by scabies include the webs and sides of the fingers, around the wrists, elbows, armpits, waist, thighs, genitalia, breasts and lower buttocks. Persons with scabies sometimes develop skin infections due to scratching – signs and symptoms of skin infections include redness, warmth, pain/tenderness, swelling and pus at the site of infection. The first time a person gets scabies, the itching begins in 4 to 6 weeks. If a person has had scabies before, s/he is more sensitive, and symptoms appear much more quickly, often within 1 to 4 days.

How is scabies spread?

Scabies is usually spread through prolonged, close personal contact. For example, persons who share a bed or who have sex together are more likely to spread scabies to one another.

How long are people contagious?

Persons with scabies infestations may spread the mite as long as they are infested and untreated.

Who gets scabies?

Anyone can get scabies. Scabies can affect people of any age, gender, race or level of cleanliness. Even if a person has had a scabies infestation before, s/he can be infested again if exposed to the mites. Outbreaks of scabies may occur in nursing homes, institutions, and childcare centers.

What treatment is available for people with scabies?

Your doctor can prescribe medicated skin lotions to treat scabies. These medications should be used exactly as described by your health care provider. Trim fingernails and clean under them to remove any mites or eggs. Persons who have had skin contact with an infested person (including family members, roommates, and sexual contacts) should also be treated at the same time as the infested person. Sometimes, itching may last for as long as several weeks after effective treatment. Antihistamine or steroid medicines may reduce the itching. Skin infections may require antibiotic therapy.

Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work or daycare?

People should be kept home until the day after treatment with the medicated lotion.

How can I protect myself and my family from getting scabies?

- If someone in a family has scabies, everyone in the household should be checked. Everyone with scabies in the same household should be treated on the same day.

- The clothing of persons infested with scabies and worn within three days of treatment, and their bed linens, should be washed in hot water and dried in a hot dryer. Articles that cannot be washed may be dry-cleaned or bagged in plastic for seven days.