

Scabies

What is scabies?

Scabies is a skin condition caused by infestation with a tiny parasite *Sarcoptes scabiei*, also known as a mite. Scabies mites burrow under the skin, producing pimple-like bumps, which can develop into a rash.

Who gets scabies?

The *Sarcoptes scabiei* mite only infests humans. It can occur in all levels of socioeconomic groups or personal hygiene. Scabies spreads more easily in crowded settings or where frequent skin-to-skin contact occurs such as long-term care facilities, institutions and child care centers.

How is scabies spread?

Scabies mites are spread by direct skin-to-skin contact. Transfer of scabies from undergarments or bedclothes can happen only if these are reused immediately after used by an affected person. Scabies can also be spread during sexual contact.

What are the symptoms of scabies?

The most common symptom of scabies is severe itching, especially at night. In adults, the areas of the skin most affected by scabies are folds of the skin, including finger sides and webs, the bend of the knee and elbow, the area around the belt line, wrists, armpits, genitals, breasts, and lower buttocks. In children, the feet and toes are also commonly affected.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms will appear in two to six weeks in people who have never had scabies. People who have had scabies before may show symptoms sooner, within one to four days.

How long is a person able to spread scabies?

A person can spread scabies until the mites and eggs have been destroyed by treatment.

What is the treatment for scabies?

Skin lotions are available from a doctor for the treatment of scabies. The lotions are applied to the whole body except the head and neck and left on the skin until the next day before bathing. All clothes and linens need to be laundered at that time as well. Clothes and bedding should be washed in hot water. In some situations, retreatment seven to 10 days later may be needed. All affected persons in a household or setting must be treated at the same time for effective treatment when more than one person has scabies. Even though the treatment is working, itching may continue for a few days after treatment.

What can be done to stop the spread of scabies?

You can prevent scabies by avoiding physical contact with people who have scabies and their belongings, especially clothing and bedding. Early proper treatment of infested persons is extremely important to stop the spread of scabies. People who have had skin-to-skin contact with affected people should also be treated to prevent infestation.

Should people with scabies attend school or a child care setting?

People who have completed one treatment for scabies (including laundering clothing and bedding) may safely return to school or a child care setting.