

Scabies

WHAT IS IT? Scabies is a skin infection that is caused by a microscopic bug called a mite. The mite lives on the surface and burrows down into the skin. Scabies causes a skin rash that itches intensely, especially at night. The rash can be found between the fingers, around the wrists, elbows, underarms, nipples, abdomen, waist, buttocks, penis, and feet. In infants, the head, neck, palms, and soles may be involved. The rash typically starts as red bumps and white threadlike lines. The rash is extremely itchy and often gets covered with scratch marks and bruises.

HOW IS IT SPREAD? Scabies is spread by skin-to-skin contact between people. The mites can also be shed onto clothes, towels, pillows, bedding and furniture. They can spread when these items are shared.

WHEN IS IT CONTAGIOUS? Scabies is contagious as long as the mites are alive. It is commonly contagious during the weeks before the symptoms start. After exposure to scabies, it can take 4-6 weeks to develop symptoms. People who have been previously exposed to scabies may experience symptoms within 1-4 days. When the mites are off the body (e.g., on clothes) they do not survive for more than 3-4 days.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED AND TREATED? Scabies is diagnosed by the typical symptoms. Sometimes a skin scraping may be examined under the microscope. Scabies are treated by applying a special insecticide body lotion. The body lotion is then rinsed off after a certain amount of time depending on the medication used. Treatment is usually repeated after 7-10 days to kill any newly hatched mites. Consult your health care provider for the appropriate treatment; the medication can be dangerous for infants and women who are pregnant or nursing.

After treatment, itching commonly persists for weeks. This does not necessarily mean that repeat treatment is necessary. Anti-itching lotions (e.g., calamine) or antihistamine medications might help relieve the itching.

SHOULD THE CHILD STAY HOME? A child with scabies should be sent home from the program and may return the day after treatment is completed.

HOW CAN WE LIMIT THE SPREAD?

- Scabies often spreads to other children and adults in child care situations and to family members. Consult your health care provider or local health department – they may recommend treatment for all exposed children and adults. The measure followed in the schools should also be followed at home at the same time.
- Launder clothes, towels and bedding in a machine with detergent and hot water. Dry in a hot dryer or press with a hot iron. For non-washable items (e.g., pillows) dry-clean or seal in a plastic bag for 4-7 days.
- Vacuum carpets and upholstered furniture.
- Separate personal clothes (e.g., jackets) and bedding in individual cubbies for each child.