

# SCABIES

## The Scabies Mite



### What is scabies?

Scabies is a skin rash caused by mites that burrow under the skin and produce small red bumps and severe itching.

### How is it spread?

Scabies is spread by direct, prolonged skin-to-skin contact with someone who has it. This includes sharing a bed or any other close physical contact. Scabies can also be passed from one person to another by exchanging clothing or sharing sheets or towels. A quick handshake or hug usually does not spread it, but holding hands can.

When a person is infested with scabies the first time, symptoms usually do not appear for up to two months (2-6 weeks) after being infested: however, an infected person can still spread scabies during this time even though they do not have symptoms. If a person has had scabies before, symptoms will appear much sooner.

### How can you tell if you have scabies?

People with scabies get a pimple-like rash with red bumps or bumps with fluid or pus inside. The bumps can show up on any part of the body, but are most often seen on the skin folds at the wrists, elbows and knees, between fingers and toes, at the waist and on the penis or breast(s). In babies under two years old, scabies can also show up on the head, neck, palms and soles of the feet.

White or red thread-like areas may be seen on the skin (this is where the mite digs into and under the skin). The rash is usually very itchy. It is often worse at night. If you think you or your child/children may have scabies, see your health care provider right away.

### How can you get rid of scabies?

Medications and washing clothing, towels and sheets with detergent in hot water and drying them in a hot dryer will get rid of the mites. Scabies mites generally do not survive more than 2-3 days away from human skin.

Because symptoms of scabies are due to a hypersensitivity reaction (allergy) to mites and their feces, itching still may continue for several weeks after treatment, even if all the mites and eggs are killed. If new burrows or pimple-like rash lesions continue to appear, re-treatment may be necessary.

Scabies is treated with a medicated cream or lotion. No over-the-counter (non-prescription) products have been tested and approved to treat human scabies. This cream must be ordered by your health care provider. The usual medication is listed below:

#### Elimite (Permethrin 5% cream)

- Rub cream into the skin from head to soles of the feet including the scalp in infants.
- Leave on the skin for 8-14 hours.
- Wash well with soap and water (this is best done in the shower).
- Clean clothing should be worn after treatment.
- Some discomfort (i.e., itching, burning, numbness) may continue and increase for a short while. See your health care provider if this is very uncomfortable.
- One dose is usually enough to get rid of scabies.

## How do you keep from getting scabies again or giving it to others?

- Because it may take a long time (4-6 weeks) to develop the rash after you have been in contact with scabies, all members of the household, including close contacts of family members, should use the medicine at the same time. This should also include a babysitter's household. Since the number of children in a school or a child care group is large and usually all children do not have close contact, we **DO NOT** suggest treating everyone in these places. However, the teacher or director should be told about the scabies in order to inform other parents.
- Sheets, towels and clothing worn next to the skin should be washed in hot water with detergent and dried in a hot dryer or dry cleaned.
- Blankets and clothing that cannot be washed can be stored in plastic bags for at least 72 hours. Scabies generally do not survive more than 2-3 days away from human skin.
- Spraying the house is not necessary.
- Children with scabies may return to school/child care the day after treatment is completed.

References: <http://www.cdc.gov/parasites/scabies> [www.guilfordhealth.org](http://www.guilfordhealth.org)



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