



## Infection Prevention & Control

### Fact Sheet

# SCABIES

#### What is Scabies?

Scabies is a contagious skin condition that is characterized by small itchy bumps and blisters caused by tiny mites that burrow into the top layer of human skin to lay their eggs. It occurs all over the world, and can affect people of all races and social classes. Scabies spreads quickly in crowded conditions where there is frequent skin-to-skin contact between people. Hospitals, child-care centers and nursing homes are examples. People with weakened immune systems and the elderly are at risk for a more severe form of scabies, called Norwegian or crusted scabies.



#### What are the signs and symptoms of Scabies?

The symptoms of scabies are an allergic reaction to the mites. There is usually an itching skin irritation and tiny reddened dots with surrounding redness or streaks of redness. The itching is usually much worse at night or after a hot bath or shower. The rash is often found in the finger and toe webs, under the breasts or buttocks, at the belt line and around the wrists, elbows, knees, ankles and armpits.

#### How does it spread?

The mite is generally transmitted from person-to-person by close body contact (skin to skin) with a person already infested with scabies. Contact, such as a quick handshake or hug, will usually not spread infestation. Sharing clothes, housecoats, slippers, towels, and bedding, sleeping bags, and furniture throws can spread scabies.

#### How soon after infestation will symptoms begin?

For a person who has never been infested with scabies, symptoms may take 4-6 weeks to begin. For a person who has had scabies, symptoms can appear within one to four days. You do not become immune to an infestation of scabies.

#### How are scabies treated?

There are several prescription creams, lotions and soaps available to treat scabies. The most common agents are Nix™ and Kwellada™. Instructions for use are included with the products and should be followed carefully (e.g. whole body is to be treated from the neck down and ensure there is coverage under the nails and toenails. Use the full amount recommended in the instructions). Normally, only one treatment is needed but sometimes 2 or more treatments are required. **Itching can persist for up to 2 weeks or longer.** Your health care provider may prescribe additional medication (oral antihistamine medication) to relieve itching if it is severe.

No new rashes should appear 24-48 hours after effective treatment. If someone assists in the application of the treatment onto the infested individual, that person should wear gloves when they are applying the treatment. If there will be any opportunity for any skin contact during the treatment, wear a gown or a long sleeved shirt to cover those areas. Treatment should be done at bedtime to reduce the risk of the medication being washed off during normal daily activities. If the person uses the washroom at night and washes their hands, reapply the treatment to the hands before returning back to bed.

**How are scabies prevented?**

Persons with symptoms should be checked and diagnosed by their doctor so that scabicide treatment can be completed as soon as possible. Persons living in the same house and having skin-to-skin contact with someone with scabies should be treated at the same time to prevent scabies before symptoms develop.

Avoid sharing items such as clothing, housecoats, slippers, bedding, furniture throws, and towels with someone who is or may be infested. If any of these items have been used within the 3 days prior to treatment, they should be machine-washed in hot soapy water and dried in a hot dryer, or dry cleaned following treatment.

Mattresses which have been used by an infested person should be cleaned and vacuumed thoroughly in all cracks and crevices. Do not use mattress for 72 hours after vacuuming. If infested individual lounges or sleeps on other cloth furniture, these need to be cleaned and vacuumed as well. Vacuum the carpets in these rooms at the same time. Remove vacuum cleaner bag and place into a garbage bag, tie closed and remove to outside garbage container.

It is critical that the timing of the scabies treatment and the cleaning/vacuuming be done within the same 24 hour period so that the individual is not re-infested.

**Did my pet spread scabies to me?**

No. Pets become infested with a different kind of scabies mite. If your pet is infested with scabies, (also called mange) and they have close contact with you, the mite can get under your skin and cause itching and skin irritation. However, the mite dies in a couple of days and does not reproduce. The mites may cause you to itch for several days, but you do not need to be treated with special medication to kill the mites.

Until your pet is successfully treated, mites can continue to burrow into your skin and cause you to have symptoms.

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